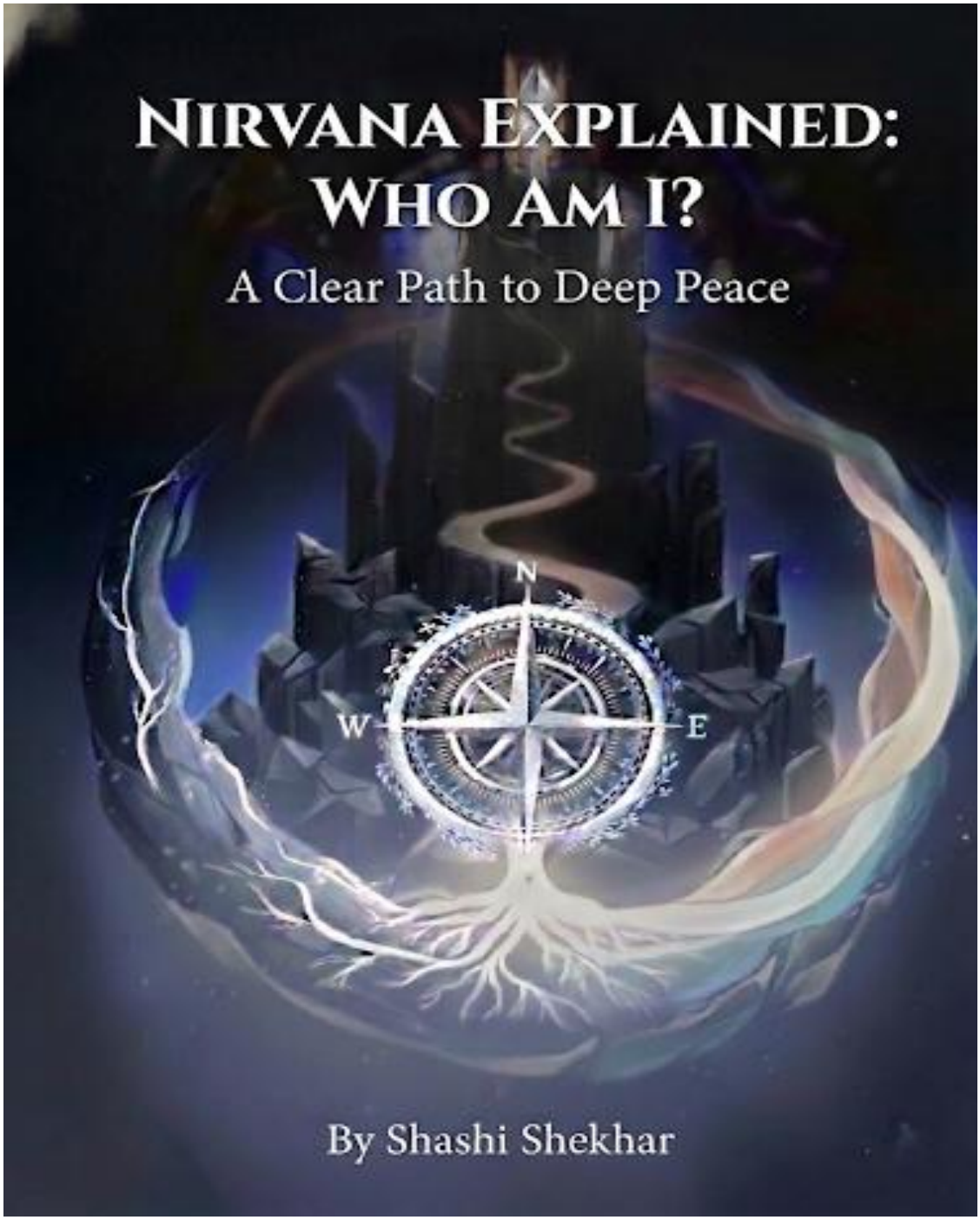
NIRVANA EXPLAINED:
WHO AM I?
A Clear Path to Deep Peace
N
W
E
By Shashi Shekhar

Acknowledgement

Much has already been said about the cessation of suffering, and this book does not claim to introduce an entirely new philosophy. The teachings and principles explored here are grounded in an understanding of Nirvana as taught by the Gautama Buddha, through the path of Sīla (ethics), Dhyāna (meditative cultivation), and Gyāna (insight).

However, the way these teachings are presented has been shaped through direct engagement—by studying, practicing, questioning, and repeatedly re-examining them—so that they may be understood not only intellectually, but also through lived experience.

During the course of writing this book, I examined various metaphysical doctrines proposed across philosophical traditions, including questions concerning the ultimate nature of reality, God, the soul, and rebirth. Yet this work did not arise from certainty or philosophical comfort. It emerged from moments when explanations failed and only honesty remained.

There is also a dimension of peace that is not dependent on conditions. It may not be immediately obvious, yet it quietly invites a deeper inquiry into whether peace can remain even as life continues to move through change.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their patience and support throughout this long period of questioning and exploration. Their presence provided stability during times when clarity was still unfolding.

I also thank colleagues who questioned, challenged, disagreed, and remained engaged. Their willingness to think critically, rather than agree easily, sharpened this inquiry far more than affirmation ever could.

Finally, I acknowledge pain—not as an enemy, but as an uncompromising teacher. It stripped away comforting assumptions, exposed the limits of language, and demanded something more honest than belief. Without it, this book might have remained decorative rather than necessary.

This book reflects the personal views of the author. No organization, institution, or employer is responsible for, or affiliated with, the opinions expressed here.

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Preface

There are moments in a human life when nothing seems to work.

Not discipline.
Not intelligence.
Not faith.
Not philosophy.
Not success.
Not rituals.
Not affirmations.
Not meditation.
Not even the words we have repeated for years simply to feel steady.

There comes a point when a person realizes—not through thought, but through a kind of inner collapse—that many of the tools we relied upon are not always sufficient to withstand the full weight of human suffering.

A pressure so heavy that breathing itself feels unfamiliar.
A fear that settles deep within the body.
A self-blame that quietly consumes from within.
A confusion so thick that even thinking feels uncertain.
A trembling that makes even the simplest sense of self feel fragile.

These moments do not care whether one is spiritual, intelligent, or well-prepared. They unfold in a way that feels immediate and unavoidable.

And in such moments, something becomes clear—many of the ideas we trusted are not necessarily wrong, but they may be too limited for the depth of what is being experienced. When suffering becomes intense, even the most refined philosophy can begin to feel distant, and the mind may no longer find support in what once seemed meaningful.

It was through such moments that a different kind of understanding began to take shape.

Not a new belief.
Not a new certainty.

But a quiet shift—from seeking complete explanations about life to recognizing what remains meaningful and usable within life as it is lived.

The ultimate nature of reality and consciousness may remain beyond complete understanding. Yet something simple becomes evident: a human being does not need only answers about the universe, but something that can remain steady within the changing conditions of life.

Not something perfect.
Not something supernatural.
Not something distant.

Just something honest enough to remain when nothing else seems to.

This book does not present a doctrine about ultimate reality.

Instead, it offers a practical way of engaging with life—one that aims at reducing suffering and, where possible, allowing it to come to an end when conditions no longer sustain it.

This work was not written from a place of victory, but from a place of honesty. Not the honesty of certainty, but the honesty that remains when familiar assumptions begin to fall away.

Yet this book is not only for those in visible pain.

It is also for those whose lives appear stable, even fulfilling, yet who sense a subtle restlessness beneath the surface. People who live, love, work, and care deeply, yet notice that peace often fades when life becomes intense again.

This book speaks to both:

• the heart that seeks stability
• and the heart that seeks something deeper

It does not promise a life without pain.
It does not promise permanent comfort.
It does not promise that the world will align with our expectations.

Instead, it offers something simpler—and perhaps more reliable:

A way of living that reduces unnecessary conflict within experience.
A way of responding when action is possible.
And a way of allowing experience when action is no longer possible.

Within this simplicity, there may emerge a quiet, durable ease—one that does not depend entirely on changing conditions, and that can remain even as life continues to unfold.

If you have ever found yourself wondering:

"Is there a way to remain steady without turning away from reality?"

then this book is for you.

Not as instruction from teacher to student.
Not as authority from philosopher to follower.

But as a shared exploration from one human being to another, offering what remained when explanations no longer held.

Chapter 1

When Pain Tests Philosophy

In this chapter, we will examine how an incorrect understanding of philosophy—or even a correct understanding applied without sensitivity to conditions—can lead to significant difficulty. Pain becomes the most direct examiner of the strength and depth of any philosophy.

Imagine you are fired from your job.

Your family depends on you.
Rent is due.
Sleep has already begun to deteriorate.

And in that moment, you repeat to yourself:

"There is no experiencer. There is no one who exists independently."

You are not necessarily liberated.

You may be disengaging from the immediate reality of the situation.

Because in that moment, pressure is present. Fear is present. Responsibility is present. The tightening in the chest is present.

None of these disappear simply because a correct statement is repeated.

Reality does not dissolve because philosophy is recited.

Now imagine your landlord standing at the door asking for rent.

And you respond inwardly—or outwardly—with:

"Aham Brahmāsmi."

The situation will not resolve through that statement.

And in that moment, something becomes clear:

whatever Brahman may mean, it is not what was previously assumed in that context.

Imagine public humiliation.

Mockery.

Being cornered—physically or psychologically.

And you tell yourself:

"Everything is illusion. Nothing exists independently."

Pain will not engage in philosophical debate.

It presents a direct challenge:

"Is this understanding usable right now?"

Now imagine intense physical pain—illness, burning heat, or extreme discomfort.

And you repeat:

"Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional."

Pain does not disappear in response to the statement.

Instead, it exposes the difference between conceptual understanding and actual capacity.

These examples are not meant to dismiss philosophy.

They are meant to prevent its misuse.

The absence of a separate experiencer may still be valid as an insight.

The lack of an independent controller may still hold true.

But truth does not automatically become usable wisdom under all conditions.

What remains valid at an abstract level may become impractical—or even counterproductive—when applied without sensitivity to the state of the nervous system.

Pain does not depend on belief.

It operates through direct physiological and psychological processes.

The nervous system is not concerned with metaphysical conclusions.

It is oriented toward survival, protection, and the reduction of perceived threat.

And what is experienced as "threat" varies from person to person—based on history, conditioning, and current circumstances.

This is why an incorrect understanding of philosophy—or a correct understanding applied without regard for conditions—can become problematic.

Not because philosophy is without value.

But because philosophy is not a substitute for reality.

Pain exposes borrowed understanding.

It exposes decorative wisdom.

It exposes everything that has not been integrated deeply enough to remain functional under pressure.

Pain does not respond to what we claim to understand.

It reveals what has actually been integrated.

It does not matter how many teachings one has encountered, or how convincing they appeared in calm situations.

Pain clarifies:

Any understanding that collapses under pressure has not yet been fully integrated.

Any teaching that demands denial in moments of crisis can become harmful.

This chapter is not asking you to abandon philosophy.

It is asking you to recognize its limits and use it appropriately.

Recognizing limits does not deny truth.

It places truth in the context of human capacity, timing, and conditions—not as an escape from pain, but as support for navigating it.

Because the central issue is not philosophy itself.

The issue is the gap between abstract understanding and lived reality.

Human life does not unfold only in calm environments.

It includes responsibility, pressure, fear, uncertainty, and loss.

A philosophy that functions only in ideal conditions but becomes unusable in ordinary life remains incomplete.

What is needed is a way of understanding that remains applicable even when conditions become difficult.

A way of engaging with life that does not deny reality, but works with it.

Peace in Action does not promise permanent calmness.

It does not promise control over life.

Instead, it begins with a simple recognition:

Life unfolds through changing conditions.

Peace becomes possible not by controlling those conditions, but by responding to them with clarity and appropriateness.

In the chapters that follow, we will learn to distinguish:

• what remains valid across conditions
• what must be applied with sensitivity
• and what should not be used in moments of overwhelm

Because the goal is not to appear wise.

The goal is to remain functional, responsive, and grounded.

Even when pain arrives without invitation.

And, at some point, it does.

Chapter 2: Nirvana Explained

In this chapter, we will explore:

1. What is Nirvana?
2. What is the path for the cessation of suffering?
3. What is the practical understanding of craving as the root cause of suffering?
4. What is the nature of Nirvana and the different stages of realization?
5. What is the takeaway of this chapter?

1. What is Nirvana?

Nirvana is the ending of mental suffering and the process that creates it.

An untrained person suffers from two arrows: physical pain and mental suffering. A trained person experiences physical pain, but mental suffering does not arise in the same way.

2. What is the path for cessation of suffering?

This chapter is not expressed in the exact wording of the Gautama Buddha, as several parts include my own direct observations; however, the core insights remain aligned with his teaching.

Cessation of suffering involves three points. The first two are presented separately for ease of understanding, but they are included within the third, which is essential for the cessation of mental suffering irrespective of conditions.

1. Action as per the requirement
2. Compassion
3. Integrated approach of ethics, meditative cultivation, and wisdom

1. Action as per requirement

When action is possible to address a situation, it should be undertaken with intent grounded in ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom. When action is not possible, the situation should be allowed to unfold as it is, irrespective of its duration or outcome, without speculation about its end, in recognition of the absence of an independent controller regardless of conditions.

a. If it is possible to resolve, act with intent rooted in ethics, mindfulness, and wisdom

Whatever the ultimate nature of reality may be, it is observable that living systems tend toward stability, and not acting as per the requirement of a situation leads to unnecessary restlessness.

Hence, considering all forms of engagement—such as delighting in experience, holding pleasant experience, resisting painful situations, or wishing for fulfilment— Considering all forms of engagement as unworthy is either a misinterpretation of philosophy or a philosophically unsound position.

Such engagements include protecting life, maintaining health, helping others, taking rest, and, for a worldly person, maintaining moderate financial security and stable family relationships within ethical guidelines. These are indicators of a healthy and functional intent.

b. When action is not possible, the situation should be allowed to unfold as it is

When wise and ethical action is not possible, a mindful non-resistance to painful experience is needed. This does not mean liking the pain, but clearly seeing that, at that moment, it cannot be stopped or resolved.

Attempts to forcefully stop painful emotions or to mentally resolve certain questions often increase the pain and strengthen its repetition.

Such questions are those that are speculative in nature and do not lead to a clear conclusion, but instead keep the mind engaged in repeated thinking and increase suffering.

The more such patterns are repeated, they may become stronger, appearing more frequently, with greater intensity and duration, and sometimes even without any related external trigger; however, in some cases, their intensity may temporarily reduce through emotional expression, such as crying, though it is not certain whether this leads to lasting resolution.

Such queries include:
what others think about us,
whether they remember us or have forgotten us,
whether this pain will be eliminated or only reduced with the passage of time,
why we are among the unfortunate ones,
whether there is a way to remain always happy irrespective of conditions and to forget painful experiences at will,
why the world appears cruel in not caring for our well-being despite our loyalty and commitment.

When resistance is reduced, a relatively vast field of peace may arise in which pain coexists without sharp mental suffering. Deep breathing may further support this process.

It is a temporary measure, but the more this non-resistance is repeated, the weaker this tendency may become, as not attempting to stop it prevents its multiplication and reduces both its impact and persistent fantasizing about it.

This prevents engagement in the extremes of indulgence and renunciation. Indulgence leads to a predominantly strained existence for fleeting moments of gratification, either due to non-attainment or the instability of what is attained, often accompanied by unresolved speculative concerns. Renunciation, when extreme, generates unnecessary restlessness and contributes no meaningful benefit to oneself or others.

This understanding reflects the Middle Path, in which one is not driven by the views of extreme indulgence or extreme renunciation, but remains responsive and flexible according to conditions, guided by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

2. Compassion

Just like us, others are also limited and do not want to suffer. Seeing this, a deep bond develops based on kindness. Caring for others without expectation of return, as far as conditions allow, gives rise to a deeply fulfilling joy. Here, joy is a byproduct and not the driving force.

Furthermore, if someone does not want our love, then not pursuing that person—unless it is critically required—so that he or she may remain at ease, can be deeply fulfilling on multiple occasions, especially when accompanied by well-wishes whenever the memory arises. However, this is not always possible, as painful experiences may still arise due to prior conditioning or trauma, even when there is no intention to pursue and well-wishes are present.

Caring for others is important, but preventing our own collapse is equally vital, both for helping others and for stabilizing our own living system.

The aforementioned two steps may help in immediate recovery. However, a sustainable solution exists in the proper understanding of the third point.

3. Integrated approach of ethics, meditative cultivation, and wisdom

a. Ethics

Ethics is about living in a non-harmful manner. An unethical life may lead to internal conflict, such as guilt from hurting others or being remembered as a person who lies or behaves poorly. It also helps to avoid social conflict and legal consequences.

For a layperson, it includes truthfulness, non-violence, not stealing, avoiding intoxicants, and avoiding misconduct in sensual indulgence.

For a worldly person, where reduction in suffering is generally more feasible than complete cessation—due to multiple roles and dependencies—the Gautama Buddha allowed moderation and ethical restraint in sensual indulgence, power, money, and relationships.

A monk aiming at the permanent cessation of suffering practices stronger restraint in sensual indulgence, power, money, and relationships, as these are considered additional burdens rather than sins.

b. Meditative cultivation

The more we engage in replaying painful emotions, the more they tend to be strengthened.

Scattered attention arises from the mental replay of painful emotions and the habit of reactivity, both of which are rooted in unwholesome tendencies such as greed (craving, clinging—will be discussed later in this chapter), hatred (anger, irritation), and the delusion of identity (the belief in a separate and unchanging experiencer and doer, which will be explored in the wisdom section).

Stability and stillness are strengthened by introducing a substitute in the form of non-sensual well-being through **concentration** in meditative sessions and constructive engagement in daily routines—such as work, hobbies, and helping others.

This process is supported by **mindfulness** of the body, desire, experience, and intention, along with clarity regarding identity and **right effort to develop wholesome states**, with intention (Chanda) rooted in non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

The more we engage in constructive activity, the more it is strengthened until it becomes a habit. Consequently, the less mental investment we make in replaying painful emotions, the weaker the tendency to repeat them becomes.

If conditions are aligned, the pain may even cease entirely, leaving only memory without the same painful intensity.

Undivided attention helps us function in the present as required and improves effectiveness.

The Four Stages of Dhyana

1. The First Dhyana:

The mind withdraws from sensual desires and unwholesome states by actively focusing on the breath. Through the initial effort of directed thinking and evaluation, a "coarse" sense of rapture (physical thrill) and joy (mental happiness) is experienced. At this stage, attention is being gathered and stabilized.

2. The Second Dhyana:

Conscious effort regarding the breath ceases. While rapture and joy remain, they are now born of steady concentration (Samadhi), as the process shifts from effort toward flow.

3. The Third Dhyana:

The intense, "bubbly" rapture—which is still a form of mental agitation—fades away. It is replaced by a refined, steady happiness and profound physical ease. The practitioner remains mindful and alert, undisturbed by the fading of excitement, dwelling in a state of "pleasantness" without dependence on intensity.

4. The Fourth Dhyana:

In this final stage, even the refined, silent joy is dropped. The polarities of pleasure and pain, joy and grief, are no longer clung to. What remains is clear awareness and non-resistance. It is seen that no separate "experiencer" exists to whom things happen—nor is there one expecting the results of rapture or joy. Similarly, no separate "doer" exists who performs actions. Instead, experience and action unfold as an interdependent, impersonal process. This understanding – that there is no separate experiencer or doer - will be explained in the wisdom section.

Dhyāna offers a relatively stable, non-sensual form of pleasure, less dependent on external conditions. While sensual activities may bring temporary relaxation, repeated indulgence often results in a sense of being drained, whereas Dhyāna cultivates a deeper and more enduring calmness.

c. Wisdom

1. Impermanence

As discussed earlier, desires play an important role in stabilizing the living system, as they support life, health, helping others, and activity. Even the intention to move toward desire lessness or freedom is itself a form of desire.

However, there is another aspect of desire: it depends on conditions. These conditions may remain stable for some time, even for extended periods, but they have the potential to change (impermanence).

What is impermanent cannot provide fully reliable and lasting satisfaction, and this limitation is referred to as dukkha.

2. Dukkha

Apart from seeing the useful side of desire, it is necessary to see its limitations—not to develop hatred toward it, but to develop dispassion, so that one is not overwhelmed by it and can develop a wise relationship with desire and a kind relationship with others.

Contrary to common belief, pleasant experience may be relatively more stable in a dispassionate state, as there is less fear of loss and a deeper engagement with the present moment.

With an integrated approach combining ethics, meditative cultivation, and wisdom in a supportive environment, the urge toward unskilful intent gradually dissolves without leaving any residue of suppression.

a. Others may be fortunate to have relatively stable conditions, but we may not belong to that group.

b. Even if we achieve what we want, suffering may arise in multiple ways:

1. the pressure of maintaining what has been achieved, including expectations related to money, sensual indulgence, work-life balance, expression of care, appearance, competition, talent, personal contribution, power, hobbies, and environment (family or location)
2. fear of loss (job, relationships, appearance, fame, life, health etc)
3. actual loss
4. comparison
5. fading of intense excitement and difficulty in maintaining the same level repeatedly

6. dissatisfaction due to focusing on what is not present

c. If we do not achieve what we want, suffering may intensify:

1. feelings of worthlessness regarding character, appearance, talent, money, or power
2. confusion about others' thoughts and whether they remember us
3. deprivation of companionship, money, or respect
4. jealousy
5. imagining the future as painful and life as meaningless

d. Conditionality in specific relationships

For a worldly person, bias may arise due to birth in a particular nation, religion, or organization; hence, relationships are often not unconditional but influenced by such conditions.

Seeing both the usefulness of desire and its unreliability—since it depends on conditions—rather than blindly indulging in it (leading to the burden of achieving or maintaining it) or unnecessarily suppressing it (leading to avoidable suffering), a middle approach is followed. Since outcomes are uncertain and not under independent control, clinging to them for fulfilment leads to suffering

This involves engaging or disengaging with actions as required, with the intention of minimizing harm and maximizing benefit to oneself and others.

3. Non-Self

No Separate Experiencer

No one, including the Gautama Buddha, has fully explained the ultimate origin of subjective experience in the sense of how non-physical consciousness arises from physical processes binding inputs. However, the Buddha clearly demonstrated how experience and action arise based on interdependent conditions, how experience and action lack a permanent, independent, and controlling self behind them, and how ignorance of "me," "mine," or "myself" is not something behind experience or action—rather than as a dependent process—leads to suffering.

For anything to be a separate experiencer, it must be independent, unchanging, and a controller. We will first understand why these are necessary, and then examine whether any such candidate is found within us, as us, or even possible beyond experience.

Characteristics Required for an Experiencer

An experiencer must be independent. Whatever depends on conditions arises when conditions are present and disappears when conditions are absent. Thus, it is an event, not something to whom the event happens.

An experiencer must also be unchanging to hold continuity across time. However, everything observed keeps changing. Thus, no same experiencer is found across time.

An experiencer must also be a controller.

In any action, a thought arises, options appear, preference forms, and action follows. Each step depends on prior conditions, changes, and disappears.

These conditions include past experience, memory, learning, genetics, environment, emotional state, and the current situation. Even the thought "I am deciding" itself arises dependently. It may influence subsequent steps, but it is itself dependent on prior conditions.

If a controller existed as an independent entity, it should be able to consistently choose outcomes such as happiness, avoid confusion, and avoid suffering. This is not observed.

Even simple actions show that actions depend on intention, intention depends on conditions, and actions fail if conditions are not aligned. Thus, what appears as control is conditional, not independent. Since conditions themselves depend on further conditions, no separate controller is found.

For example, even a simple action like raising a hand depends on conditions such as need (to pick something), desire to prove control, or even randomness. It also depends on a healthy brain and a functioning body. It appears to be under control only when conditions are aligned. The real test is when conditions are not aligned — control fails.

Thus, there is intention, a decision-like process, and action, but no independent controller is found.

Examination of All Possible Candidates

Any claim of an experiencer must refer to something within experience, such as sensations, thoughts, emotions, memory, what is known (content of consciousness), or knowing itself (the event of knowing).

When we examine what is known—seeing, hearing, thinking, and feeling—we observe that it arises when conditions are present, changes continuously, and disappears when conditions cease. Thus, what is known is changing and dependent, not an experiencer to whom these changing happens or controller as everything is interdependent.

Some may claim that even if content changes, knowing remains. However, observation shows that in deep sleep there is no knowing, under anaesthesia or coma knowing disappears; with injury, knowing is altered; and with fatigue, mood, or chemicals, clarity changes.

Knowing arises only when a base (sense organs, including the mind), an object (including mental objects such as thoughts, emotions, memory, and feelings), and attention are present. If these conditions are absent, knowing does not occur. If these conditions are altered, knowing is altered.

Thus, knowing arises, varies, and disappears. Therefore, knowing itself is dependent and changing, and not an experiencer.

Direct Evidence

If observed directly, even the sense "I am knowing" is itself observed.

If it is observed, it is part of experience and therefore not the experiencer.
If it is not observed, it cannot be known and therefore cannot function as an experiencer.

Thus, whatever is known is not the experiencer, and what is not known cannot function as an experiencer.

What is found is the arising, changing, and disappearing of experience, intention, and action—including the sense of "me," "mine," "myself," "I," or "I am experiencing"—all dependent on conditions.

Events occur, but no experiencer apart from them is found. Mind-consciousness arises dependent on mental objects, the mind-base, and attention. Mental objects—such as thoughts, feelings, and emotions—arise based on conditioned processes, including contact, memory, perception, and prior tendencies. The functioning of the mind is closely associated with physical processes in the brain. However, whether the mind is fully reducible to physical processes alone remains a matter of interpretation.

From the perspective of the Gautama Buddha, the primary focus is not to provide a neuroscientific or metaphysical explanation of what the mind ultimately is, but to show that experiences arise dependently and do not require a separate experiencer as their basis. Understanding this leads to the cessation of suffering, which arises from identification with a separate experiencer to whom pain appears and who seeks fulfilment. This cessation is supported by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom. This is established through direct observation and logical analysis rather than speculative theory.

In this book, words such as 'I,' 'we,' 'you,' 'us,' 'self,' or expressions like 'should be done' are used as conventional pointing language, referring to interdependent processes rather than to any separate experiencer or independent doer.

Brain Is Not an Experiencer

The brain is a physical system composed of neural processes. Different areas perform different functions, but no single, permanent, independent centre is found that generates experience. Further, neurons or electrochemical signals themselves do not constitute an experiencer. Thus, the brain supports experience but is not an experiencer.

Responsibility and Consequence

The absence of a separate controller does not imply the absence of action, responsibility, or consequence. Actions occur, and consequences follow through an interconnected chain of cause and effect. Harmful actions contribute to conditions that lead to harmful results, while beneficial actions contribute to conditions that lead to beneficial results , though outcomes are not guaranteed, as they depend on multiple conditions beyond the action itself. Thus, cause and

effect continue to operate, and responsibility arises conditionally, even in the absence of a separate controller.

For example, if studying is a necessary condition for achieving a good score, then not studying will not lead to that outcome, even though the result itself is not guaranteed. This illustrates that, although a separate controller is absent and outcomes remain uncertain, the continuity of cause and effect sustains meaningful relationships between actions and consequences. At the same time, this chain of conditions may also lead to the cessation of certain patterns, such as desire or even the continuity of life itself.

Although an individual does not function as an independent controller, social systems continue to operate to maintain stability. Widespread harmful behaviour tends to generate suffering, which in turn conditions corrective responses within society. As a result, actions remain subject to consequences, such as punishment for harmful behaviour and reward for beneficial actions. These arise not from an independent controller, but from broader interdependent processes.

Even if reality is assumed to be fully predetermined—an assumption that cannot be objectively established, given that probabilistic events independent of prior causes cannot be excluded—the unfolding of consequences proceeds through conditioned processes of action, both passive and active. Therefore, regardless of whether one adopts a deterministic or indeterministic framework, the necessity of action remains, though whether actions are responsible or irresponsible depends on conditions.

Sense of "Me"

The sense of "me" is not denied; it is experienced. However, it is not an independent entity to whom experience happens.

It is a process—a condition-dependent phenomenon involving matter, energy, and experience—which may change, remain relatively stable, and eventually cease. In a strict technical sense, nothing observed functions as an independent entity, because an entity would have to be independent, unchanging, and a controller, and nothing observed fulfils these criteria.

This sense of "me" appears continuous due to the stitching together of events as memory, the tagging of these events as "me" by the nervous system, which has evolved as an evolutionary trait, thought and narrative using first-person language, the body acting as a coordinate but being interpreted as self, and social conditioning through statements such as "you are responsible" and "you were there," without analysing dependent processes. This leads to the assumption of a central identity, as the nervous system operates on a self-referential model.

This self-referential model is a dependent process based on the brain and environment. It functions as an important tool evolved within the nervous system, supporting language, threat detection, prioritization, and focused practice. It is to be used as a functional tool, not taken as an independent identity.

The Gautama Buddha used the body and brain as tools, not as identity (separate experiencer and separate doer). Just as an engineer or a doctor takes care of tools to serve a purpose, without

ever identifying those tools as the self. **In this book, the terms 'separate experiencer' and 'separate doer' are used interchangeably and may be collectively referred to as identity.**

There is biological continuity, such as spatial coordination and heartbeat, but this is not identification, as these are ongoing dependent processes.

This is not me (as whatever is observed is changing), not mine (as no independent controller is found, since outcomes are not commendable irrespective of conditions), and not myself (as no separate, independent experiencer or doer is found in observation). Anything beyond experience is not functionally accessible and therefore does not serve as a basis for identification. All three are interrelated.

How Ethics, Meditation, and Non-Self Support Each Other

Seeing that no separate experiencer or controller exists weakens the tendency of "myself first." As this self-centred orientation loosens, the pressure to secure personal gain or avoid loss reduces, and agitation driven by greed, fear, and aversion subsides. In the case of full realization, where this understanding is complete, greed and hatred no longer arise, as they have no basis without a separate self. In this way, understanding non-self directly leads to the absence of restlessness, without necessarily passing through moments of compassion. With the absence of agitation, attention is no longer scattered and becomes naturally steady, allowing greater sensitivity to register experience clearly. This sensitivity enables suffering to be seen as suffering without being filtered through self-concern, and from this, compassion may arise.

At the same time, compassion does not depend entirely on the understanding of non-self. Even without such understanding, compassion can arise when sensitivity dominates, and in those moments, identification is naturally reduced despite the absence of explicit insight. With the understanding of non-self, however, the weakening of "myself first" becomes more consistent, creating greater scope for sensitivity to register the suffering of others. The presence of compassion naturally supports ethical behaviour, as a compassionate person does not carry the intent to harm. In the absence of such harmful intent, inner conflict further reduces, contributing to an absence of restlessness that also supports meditative cultivation.

Even though no separate self is found, distinct functional systems and streams of experience continue to operate. These conditioned systems maintain their own stability and limitations, which means compassion does not lead to collapse or disregard for one's own functioning. Responses remain conditioned, and actions such as self-sacrifice arise only when supported by specific conditions shaped by genetics, and environment , which in turn influence temperament. Thus, compassion operates within functional balance rather than as an absolute override, while actions continue to have consequences within these conditions, showing that this understanding does not imply that nothing matters.

With reduced agitation, actions driven by fear, craving, and self-centeredness diminish, making ethical behaviour a natural expression rather than an imposed rule. The same absence of restlessness supports meditative cultivation, as the mind settles more easily into stable and

continuous awareness. Ethical living further reduces disturbance, and meditation stabilizes attention, both of which support clearer seeing and deepen the understanding of non-self.

With full realization of non-self, ethics and meditative cultivation are no longer practices that need to be deliberately maintained; in the absence of self-centred agitation, they arise naturally as expressions of the system's functioning. Further, ethics supports meditative cultivation, which supports clarity of non-self, and thus each supports the other in a continuous cycle.

Post-Understanding

For a realized person, experiences and actions may vary according to interdependent conditions. This may include remaining still or acting intensely—such as running to preserve life, health, or livelihood—with or without physiological responses such as an increased heart rate. Unpleasant psychological feelings may also arise, including fear or a sense of incompleteness, along with thoughts such as 'I am afraid.'

However, these remain as experiences only and are not accompanied by identification with a separate experiencer to whom they occur.

Psychological feeling is not equivalent to psychological suffering; suffering arises only with identification.

Thus, in the absence of identification, psychological feelings may arise and pass, but they do not develop into mental suffering.

What remains invariant is the absence of identification with a separate experiencer to whom these experiences occur—including thoughts such as "I am afraid," or any sense of seeking fulfilment or protection. This absence of identification entails the absence of psychological suffering and is revealed through practice grounded in ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

Varying Experience and Actions

A realized person may experience a wide range of mental and bodily states, including unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral feelings. Thoughts or narrations such as "I am in danger" or "I am not in danger" may arise.

In situations involving life, health, relationships, or responsibilities, there may be:

- an urge accompanied by action
- an urge without action
- no urge with action
- no urge without action

Even opposing tendencies may arise in the same individual at different times and may persist for varying durations. All such variations are understood as experiences unfolding through interdependent conditions.

These conditions include biological tendencies shaped by genetics, environmental factors, and apparent randomness. Environmental factors include training, culture, and situational aspects such as the availability or absence of options, as well as contextual purposes such as completing a task or helping others. Genetics and environment themselves depend on impersonal factors such as matter, time, space, and circumstance.

Thus, behaviour and experience naturally vary across individuals and across moments, without implying any fixed pattern.

Fixed Cessation of Identification and Suffering

Despite this variation, under no circumstances does a realized person identify as a separate experiencer to whom these experiences occur.

This absence of identification is revealed through the path of ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom. These three support the dissolution of identification, and once this is revealed, they continue as natural expressions, reinforcing each other in a mutually supportive manner.

Mental suffering is not merely unpleasant feeling; it consists of resistance and conflict. It appears as:

- attempting to stop what cannot be stopped
- avoiding what is present
- suppressing natural responses in order to appear calm

In a realized person, none of these arise. Physical pain or unpleasant sensations may still occur, but they do not develop into psychological suffering.

Subtle Forms of Identification

It is important to recognize that identification is not limited to the belief "I am a separate experiencer." Even the thought "I am not a separate experiencer" retains a subtle reference to "I" and therefore still constitutes identification.

Similarly, the urge to continue life and the urge to not continue life are both forms of urge and do not represent freedom. What defines realization is not the presence or absence of such urges, but the absence of identification with them.

With the absence of identification, there is no mental suffering. What remains is intent, action, and experience arising in dependence on conditions, but not as "my intent," "my action," or "my experience." There is functioning, but no owner of that functioning.

Illustration from the Life of the Buddha

Canonical accounts of the Gautama Buddha frequently portray composure in the face of danger—for instance, remaining unmoved before a charging elephant or encountering Angulimala without fear. Such narratives illustrate the absence of mental disturbance and the clarity associated with realization, rather than establishing fixed behavioural rules.

At the same time, these accounts do not negate functional responsiveness. The Buddha is not depicted as engaging in unnecessary self-harm, such as deliberately entering fire or ignoring basic physiological needs like hunger. This indicates that responsiveness to conditions, including potentially threatening situations, continues to operate.

If one were to claim that there is no fear at all, it would imply the absence of biological survival responses, which is not supported. In situations of danger, physiological responses such as increased heart rate and sweating may arise as conditioned bodily processes. These may be accompanied by psychological feelings such as fear, but without identification and therefore without psychological suffering.

No Fixed Rule of Behaviour

Accordingly, the behaviour of a realized individual cannot be reduced to a fixed rule.

In situations of danger, a realized person may act to preserve life or may remain still, depending on the total configuration of conditions. Similarly, an unrealized person may act to preserve life; however, such action is often accompanied by mental agitation and identification with a presumed separate experiencer whose continuity appears at stake.

In contrast, when action occurs in realization, even if a thought such as "there is a need to preserve life" arises, it functions as an event within experience. It is not appropriated by a separate subject. The thought does not serve the fulfilment or protection of an separate self, but arises dependently as part of the ongoing process.

Thus, while observable behaviour may appear similar in both cases, the underlying structure of experience differs fundamentally.

In realization:

- action unfolds without identification
- without appropriation
- without psychological conflict

Therefore, although behaviour varies according to conditions, what remains invariant is:

- **the absence of identification**
- **the absence of psychological suffering**

Whether action occurs or not, and whether one appears calm or dynamically engaged—such as running to preserve life—the defining characteristic remains unchanged: there is no separate experiencer and no internal division.

Conditions shape experience and action; realization ensures freedom from identification and psychological suffering.

Craving, Its Structure, and the Nature of Nirvana

Craving is delight and passion toward experience in which the experience is taken as fulfilling, either without identification or by sustaining a supposed separate experiencer.

This "separate experiencer" is not found as an independent and unchanging entity, yet it is implicitly assumed in the movement of seeking fulfilment—"this will complete me," "this must continue," or "this should not end." Suffering is mental pain arising in association with a supposed separate experiencer, while craving is the underlying movement that tends to generate identification leading to such suffering.

Craving is not merely the presence of delight, preference, or engagement. Any delight, preference, engagement, resistance, or holding should not be considered unworthy, as their complete absence would make functional living difficult.

Three-layer Understanding of Craving

A complete understanding of craving requires three complementary layers. These layers were mentioned earlier, but they are presented here again with additional clarity regarding identification, which has been examined in the non-self section of wisdom.

1. Functional and Stabilizing Engagement

Some forms of engagement are necessary for stabilizing the living system and preventing unnecessary restlessness, which itself may become a ground for identity (e.g., "I am the one who does not engage").

These include food, rest, learning, caring for others, and, for a worldly person, basic financial stability and relationships.

Such engagements may involve delight and can be appropriately fulfilled, when possible, with intent rooted in ethics, mindfulness, and wisdom.

2. Reduction of Additional Burdens

Certain forms of delight, though available, are not necessary for stabilization and tend to generate identity—even when one intellectually understands that no separate experiencer exists.

This becomes evident when these experiences are difficult to maintain or are not achieved, leading to suffering in the form of: "I must have this to feel complete." This may not be clearly seen when conditions are favourable.

These include sensual indulgence, accumulation of money, power, and validation-seeking.

For this reason, they are reduced or avoided, as they easily become additional burdens that strengthen identification (e.g., "I am the one who wants this"). One marker distinguishing essential from additional is that additional burdens may reduce over time after arising and escalating, whereas essential needs tend to continue escalating if not addressed, such as hunger, thirst, illness requiring treatment, or guilt when one does not help others despite having the capacity to do so. However, for certain individuals, even these additional burdens may become essential, as understanding fails to penetrate another set of conditions , including deeply reinforced habits shaped by unique combinations of genetics and environment.

3. Releasability When Resolution Is Not Possible

When a situation cannot be resolved, or action is not possible or appropriate, it should be possible to let it go.

This is done by clearly seeing that:
• the situation is not fully under one's control
• and there is no separate experiencer that remains unfulfilled

If something cannot be let go and leads to mental pain in association with a supposed separate experiencer, it indicates craving. It may exist in the form of persistent identity, even before difficult conditions arise, appearing as delight, but becoming more evident when conditions are unfavourable.

Summary of the Three Layers

Craving is not identified by surface features such as repetition, dependence, or even delight alone. It is understood through:
• appropriate engagement where required
• reduction of unnecessary burdens
• and the ability to release without suffering when conditions do not allow fulfilment

Types of Craving

Craving manifests in three forms:

1. Sensual Craving

Delight in sensory experiences such as pleasure, comfort, and stimulation.

It may begin as simple enjoyment but tends to become an additional burden when it leads to repeated seeking, maintenance pressure, and identity formation ("I am the one who enjoys this").

2. Craving for Becoming

The movement toward becoming something—seeking identity through experience.

Examples include:
• "I am special by having this"
• "I will be fulfilled through this"

This form strengthens the sense of a supposed separate experiencer to be fulfilled.

3. Craving for non-becoming

The movement toward not becoming—rejecting experience or identity while still subtly maintaining it.

Examples include:
• "I am special because I do not need anything"
• "I am beyond all experience"
• behaving in ways such as extreme withdrawal, self-denial, or harm under the assumption that nothing should affect one

This is becoming in reverse, where identity persists in a hidden form, reinforcing the same assumed identity that is not found as an independent reality.

Nature of Nirvana

As discussed in starting, Nirvana is the cessation of suffering.
Suffering is not merely pain, but pain experienced in association with a supposed separate experiencer. Since such an experience is not found as an independent reality, this association is based on a misperception.

When this misperception ceases, suffering ceases.

Why Nirvana Is Unborn, Not Destroyed, and Not Dependent

Nirvana is described as:
• unborn
• not subject to destruction
• not dependent on conditions

This is because:

Nirvana is not the cessation of a real entity, but the cessation of the misperception of a separate experiencer, which never existed as an independent reality.

What does not truly exist cannot be said to be born. What is not born cannot be destroyed or sustained.

While the path to Nirvana unfolds through conditions, Nirvana itself is not condition-dependent, as it is not an experience.

It is not an experience, because experience involves the presence of an object or the occurrence of a process. Here, however, there is the absence of both object and process.

It is known within the field of experience through change or cessation, which is a process. However, what is known—the absence—is not an experience, since it is neither an object nor a process.

Thus, all objects and processes are experienced and known, but not everything that is known is an experience. If all that is known were an object or a process, then absence would also become an object or a process. Since absence is neither, it is not an experience.

Cessation has two aspects: one is the process of ending, and the other is not a process but the absence that remains after the ending.

"At ease," "infinite bliss," and "unshakable peace," as described by the Gautama Buddha, should not be understood as states of mind that arise, persist, and disappear, but as the cessation of suffering, where suffering associated with a supposed separate experiencer does not arise again.

Ending is experienced.
Absence is not experienced.
Yet absence is known through the ending.

No One Practices Nirvana, No One Attains Nirvana

No one practices Nirvana.
No one attains Nirvana.

What is called "practice" is not performed by a separate experiencer or doer. It is the unfolding of interdependent processes.

Suffering is observed.
The intention to end it arises.
The cause is examined.
Understanding develops.
Ethics (śīla), meditative cultivation (dhyāna), and wisdom (jñāna) function as conditions.
Cessation occurs when these conditions are aligned.

At no point in this process is a separate entity found that practices or attains.

Thus, practice happens, but not by an independent practitioner.
Attainment is spoken of conventionally, but no entity is found to whom it occurs.

Nirvana is not something gained, achieved, or produced.
It is the cessation of suffering that arises due to the absence of the misperception of a separate experiencer.

Since the supposed experiencer is not found as an independent reality, its cessation is not the destruction of something real, but the ending of a misperception.

Therefore:
Practice unfolds.
Cessation occurs.
But no one practices, and no one attains.

Stages of Realisation

Progress toward Nirvana is not the attainment of something new, but the progressive weakening and eventual cessation of identification with a supposed separate experiencer.

With each stage, craving reduces because identification reduces, and with that, suffering reduces.

1. Stream-entry (Sotāpanna)

At this stage, there is a clear and irreversible understanding that no separate and unchanging experiencer or controller can be found.

This is not merely intellectual but a stable clarity.
As a result:
• identification begins to weaken
• suffering reduces significantly
• self-based narratives lose strength

However:
• craving still operates
• emotional reactions still arise
But they are increasingly seen as conditioned processes rather than "happening to me."

2. Once-returner (Sakadāgāmi)

At this stage, identification weakens further.

Craving and aversion still arise, but:
• their intensity is reduced
• their duration is shorter
• their hold weakens
Sensual desire and irritation may still appear, but they no longer dominate experience.

3. Non-returner (Anāgāmi)

At this stage, gross forms of craving are no longer present.

• sensual craving does not arise
• ill-will does not arise

The system is no longer pulled toward sensory indulgence or pushed by reactive aversion. However, subtle forms of identification may still remain, such as:
• identification with refined states
• subtle sense of "being"

4. Arahant (Complete Realisation)

At this stage, identification ceases completely.

There is:
• no sense of a separate experiencer
• no identification with any arising experience
• no craving sustaining identity

As a result:
• no mental suffering arises
• experience continues, but without ownership
• there is no resistance and no dependency

This is the complete cessation of suffering.

Clarification on Stages

These stages do not represent the acquisition of something new, but the progressive removal of misperception and identification.

With each stage:
• dependence reduces
• identification weakens
• suffering decreases

Until, eventually, suffering no longer arises.

Craving, identification, and suffering depend on the assumption of a separate experiencer.

When this assumption is clearly seen through, the movement of seeking fulfilment collapses, and with it, suffering.

What remains is a functioning process of life—arising and passing based on conditions—without attachment, without identification, and without suffering.

Takeaway Summary

For a realized person, experiences and actions may vary according to interdependent conditions. This may include remaining still or acting intensely—such as running to preserve life, health, or

livelihood—with or without physiological responses such as an increased heart rate. Unpleasant psychological feelings may also arise, including fear or a sense of incompleteness, along with thoughts such as 'I am afraid.'

However, these remain as experiences only and are not accompanied by identification with a separate experiencer to whom they occur.

Psychological feeling is not equivalent to psychological suffering; suffering arises only with identification.

Thus, in the absence of identification, psychological feelings may arise and pass, but they do not develop into mental suffering.

What remains invariant is the absence of identification with a separate experiencer to whom these experiences occur—including thoughts such as "I am afraid," or any sense of seeking fulfilment or protection. This absence of identification entails the absence of psychological suffering and is revealed through practice grounded in ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

This understanding is lived as freedom from the following burdens:

1. An unwise relationship with desire

When action is possible to address a situation, it should be undertaken with intent grounded in ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom. When action is not possible, the situation should be allowed to unfold as it is, irrespective of its duration or outcome, without speculation about its end, in recognition of the absence of an independent controller regardless of conditions.

This prevents engagement in the extremes of indulgence and renunciation. Indulgence leads to a predominantly strained existence for fleeting moments of gratification, either due to non-attainment or the instability of what is attained, often accompanied by unresolved speculative concerns. Renunciation, when extreme, generates unnecessary restlessness and contributes no meaningful benefit to oneself or others.

This understanding reflects the Middle Path, in which one is not driven by the views of extreme indulgence or extreme renunciation, but remains responsive and flexible according to conditions, guided by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

2. Hatred

Freedom from hatred arises through compassion, grounded in the recognition that others, like oneself, are limited and do not wish to suffer, and therefore require care. Such care may include appropriate firmness, while allowing freedom and maintaining goodwill, even when the other person does not wish for one's presence in their life.

This must be balanced by preserving one's own stability, avoiding emotional over-involvement unless circumstances genuinely require deeper engagement, depending on conditions.

3.Inner conflict, such as anxiety and guilt, and external consequences such as legal and social repercussions — through ethical living

4. Unskilful tendencies causing restlessness in the form of scattered attention, reactivity, and the delusion of self — through meditative cultivation using concentration, mindfulness, and right effort

5.Ignorance — through understanding:

- Desire as an unreliable source of lasting peace, though functionally important
- The absence of an imagined controller, leading to the reduction of self-blame, comparison, hatred, the pride associated with imagined personal authorship, and the pressure to guarantee results, as it is understood that intention, action, and experience arise through interdependent conditions, including the body and brain—not through a separate self acting as a controller
- The absence of a separate experiencer seeking fulfilment. This also reduces the tendency to seek validation for such an identity and softens possessive love, allowing it to transform into care rather than ownership

The first two support immediate relief, while the latter three contribute to a sustained cessation of suffering.

In summary, with this understanding, one lives a stable, clear, and compassionate life—not as an acquired experience, but in the absence of any need for experience to fulfil an imagined separate experiencer.

If suffering persists even until death and cannot be allowed to pass on its own, this indicates that the conditions for its cessation or reduction are not yet present.

Even so, the effective approaches remain non-resistance to the unfolding of action or inaction according to conditions—including engagement in a meaningful and genuine alternative; compassion; and the dissolution of the urge through ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom. Outcomes are not guaranteed; however, these remain the only effective methods.

The subsequent chapters are based on this chapter and are intended to provide deeper clarity.

Chapter 3: Who Am I?

In this chapter, we will explore:

1.Different traditions opinion on who am I?

2.Their strengths and limitations

3.Independent conclusion on who am I ?

After explaining Nirvana, a deeper philosophical question naturally arises:
Who am I?

Human beings have asked this question for thousands of years.
Different philosophical and religious traditions have offered different answers.

Some traditions claim that:
• a permanent soul exists within the body

Others claim:
• no permanent self exists

Some propose that:
• consciousness is the fundamental reality of the universe

While others suggest that:
• consciousness emerges from physical processes within the brain

Despite centuries of philosophical inquiry and modern scientific progress, the origin and complete mechanism of consciousness remain not fully understood.

Approach of This Chapter

Therefore, instead of adopting a particular belief immediately, this chapter examines the question through:
• comparative reasoning
• direct and indirect observation

The purpose of this inquiry is:
not to defend or attack any tradition,

but to examine:
• strengths
• limitations
• uncertainties

present in the major explanations of human identity.

Structure of This Inquiry

To explore the question "Who am I?", we will examine several philosophical frameworks.

These include:

1. Soul-Based Theories
   (Dvaita Vedānta, Christian theology, Islamic theology)
2. Non-Dual Consciousness Theories
   (Advaita Vedānta)
3. Process-Based Theories
   (Buddhist philosophy)
4. Emergent theories (materialist view)

1. Soul-Based Theories

Before we analyse arguments in favour, against, and form an independent conclusion at the end of the chapter, let us understand the common premises across popular traditions and where they differ.

Many philosophical and religious traditions propose that:
a non-physical soul exists within human beings.

This view appears in traditions such as:
Dvaita
Christianity
Islam
Sikhism

Although these traditions differ in theology and cosmology, they share several common assumptions about human identity.

Premises of Soul-Based Theories

The central premises are:
• A non-physical soul exists
• The soul is distinct from the body and brain
• The soul is the ultimate experiencer of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions
• The mind and brain function as instruments through which the soul experiences the world
• The soul continues to exist after physical death

Dvaita

Layered Model of the Human System

In this framework, the human system is often described as consisting of three layers:

1. Soul (Jīva or Spirit) — the experiencer

2. Mind (subtle body) — the thinking and emotional instrument
3. Brain and senses — the physical interface with the external world

Flow of Experience (According to This Model)

External world
→ sense organs
→ brain
→ mind
→ soul (awareness)

In this model,

the soul does not directly perceive the external world.
Instead, it becomes aware of:
mental events produced by the mind.

In Dvaita Vedānta, the mind is considered:
part of a subtle matter, neither the gross physical body nor consciousness.

This subtle mental system is often described as consisting of four functional aspects:
• Manas — sensory processing
• Buddhi — discrimination and judgment
• Chitta — memory
• Ahamkara — the sense of "I"

These processes together generate:
• thoughts
• emotions
• intentions

The soul becomes aware of these processes.

A Key Feature of Dvaita Vedānta

Dvaita philosophy proposes a nuanced explanation of self-awareness.

According to this view:
the soul does not directly perceive itself without the help of the mind.

Instead:
the mind generates a mental cognition of "I".

This cognition represents:
the experiencing subject.

Then:
the soul becomes aware of this mental cognition.

Mind generates the thought "I"
→ Soul becomes aware of that thought

Dvaita interprets this as:
the soul indirectly knowing itself through the mind.

Philosophical Significance

This explanation attempts to reconcile two ideas:
• the soul as a permanent subject
• the mind as the generator of mental content

Emerging Philosophical Tension

However, this introduces an important question:

If the "I" known by the soul is:
a mental construct produced by the mind,

then:
the soul appears to know only a representation of itself,

not itself directly.

Critique

Critics argue:
the soul in this model never actually knows itself directly.

Instead, it only knows:
the mental representation of self-generated by the mind.

Response from Dvaita Perspective

Dvaita philosophers respond:
this representation still refers to the real subject.

Because:
the soul remains the only stable experiencer across changing experiences.

Core Debate

This leads to a central philosophical tension:
• Is indirect awareness sufficient for self-knowledge?
• Or does it imply that the soul is never directly known?

This remains one of the key debates within soul-based theories.

Factors Influencing the Mind

Dvaita philosophy also proposes that:
the functioning of the mind depends on multiple factors.

These include:
• karmic impressions from past actions
• intrinsic tendencies of the soul

• the physical body received at birth
• environment and life experiences

Together, these shape:
• personality
• emotional responses
• behavioural tendencies

Important Observation

In this model:

actions do not arise from a single independent controller.

Instead, they emerge from:
a complex interaction between:
• soul
• mind
• body
• environment

Sikhism

The individual soul exists and functions as the experiencer. It is not independent, and there is no personal control — everything operates under Waheguru.

The key distinction is experiential:

The individual can experience the divine directly within its own capacity.

This does not mean becoming God, but experiencing God as present within, not separate.

At the same time, the individual does not become an independent controller.

Christianity

The soul is the experiencer. It uses the mind and body as instruments. It is created by God ultimate authority lies with God.

Islam

A distinction is made between nafs and rooh.
• Nafs is the experiencer. It includes identity, desires, intentions, and choice.
• Rooh is the life principle from God. It enables life but does not experience.

The nafs depends on the rooh for being alive and aware. It is not independently conscious.

Reward and punishment apply to the nafs, not the rooh.

Rooh is not accountable; nafs is accountable.

Nafs differs from the Dvaita soul because it is not independently conscious — it requires rooh. Rooh differs from Ātman in Advaita because it is created, whereas Ātman is uncreated and the only ultimate reality.

Arguments Against Soul-Based Theories

Several philosophical and scientific challenges arise when these theories are examined carefully.

1. The Interaction Problem

If the soul is non-physical and the body is physical, an important question arises:

How do they interact?

Modern science explains physical interactions through mechanisms such as:
• mass and energy
• electromagnetic forces
• chemical interactions
• neural electrical signals

However, no known mechanism explains:

how a non-physical entity could influence physical matter.

If the soul can influence the brain,

the process by which this interaction occurs remains unclear.

Soul-based traditions often respond by stating that:
• the interaction occurs through divine governance
• or through a metaphysical connection between soul and body

However:

this explanation remains unverifiable within human logic . Here, 'human logic' refers to reasoning based on observable experience, consistency, and currently available methods of verification.

2. Brain Dependence

Modern neuroscience shows strong correlations between brain activity and conscious experience.

Examples include:
• anaesthesia temporarily eliminating awareness
• brain injuries altering personality
• neurological diseases affecting memory and perception

When the brain is deeply anesthetized:

conscious experience disappears.

When the brain is damaged:

personality, memory, and perception change.

This raises a critical question:

If the soul is an independent experiencer, why does the soul appear unable to know even itself when the brain is inactive?

If the soul is:
• independent
• self-aware

then its awareness should not fully disappear under anaesthesia or coma.

Response from Soul-Based Traditions

Soul-based traditions respond that:

the brain functions as an instrument through which the soul becomes aware.

Thus:
• when the instrument is functioning → experience appears
• when the instrument is damaged → experience is distorted

A common analogy used to support the idea of a soul is that of a radio. The brain is compared to a radio receiver, while consciousness is compared to sound waves. According to this view, if the radio becomes non-functional, it does not mean that the sound waves have ceased to exist; they may still be present but cannot be received due to the damaged instrument.

Philosophical Difficulty

The radio–sound wave analogy is not entirely valid. In the case of sound waves, their existence can be independently verified through another functioning receiver. In contrast, when the brain is non-functional, there is no independent means of detecting a supposed soul or consciousness. Therefore, the analogy does not establish that consciousness exists independently of the brain.

This gap remains unverifiable through human logic and direct observation.

3. Split-Brain Experiments

In rare medical cases, surgeons separate the two hemispheres of the brain to treat severe epilepsy.

After such procedures:

research suggests that two independent streams of awareness may emerge within the same body.

For example:
• one hand may perform an action
• the other hand may attempt to correct or oppose it

This suggests:

parallel and partially independent processing of experience.

Philosophical Question

If the soul is:
• single
• indivisible
• the sole experiencer

then:

how can divided brain processes produce apparently separate streams of awareness?

Response from Soul-Based View

Some philosophers respond:

the soul remains one,

but expresses awareness through multiple neural systems.

Remaining Difficulty

However, this explanation again highlights:

a strong dependence of experience on brain structure.

Thus:

the claim of a single independent experiencer

remains unverifiable within human logic and observation.

Independent Logical Assessment of Soul-Based Theories

From a neutral perspective, soul-based theories have both strengths and limitations.

Strengths

• They provide a clear explanation of personal continuity across time
• They explain why experience appears to belong to a subject

Limitations

• The hypothesis cannot be verified within human logic or observation
• The mechanism of interaction between soul and brain remains unexplained
• Scientific evidence strongly links experience to brain processes
• Self-awareness appears dependent on mental processes rather than direct soul awareness

2. Advaita Vedānta (Non-Dual Consciousness Theory)

Advaita Vedānta presents a radically different explanation of identity.

Core Framework

According to this philosophy:
• ultimate reality is Brahman (pure consciousness)

• the individual self (Ātman) is identical with Brahman
• the world appears through ignorance (Māyā)

Core Claim

In this framework:

the sense of individuality arises because:

consciousness mistakenly identifies with:
• body
• mind

Liberation occurs when:

this identification ends,

and it is realized that:

individual self = universal consciousness

Advaita Description of Consciousness

Advaita describes consciousness as:
• unchanging
• non-doer
• non-agent
• the enabling ground of all experience

According to Advaita:

consciousness itself:
• does not act
• does not change

Instead:

it enables:
• mind
• senses
• experience

Thus, no separate experiencer exists, but experience is enabled by a fixed, unchanging, and non-doer consciousness. It is beyond time because it does not change , whereas time involves change.

In Advaita, a brick is non-separate from consciousness as ultimate reality, yet it lacks individual awareness due to the absence of a mind. The word 'appearance' used in this philosophy does not mean that nothing exists; rather, it points to the fact that nothing is independent.

Common Analogies

Advaita uses several analogies:
• the sun illuminating objects without acting

• a mirror reflecting images without changing
• a screen on which a movie appears

Important Clarification

These analogies help illustrate the idea.

However:

they remain philosophical illustrations, not empirical proof.

Because:

unlike the sun, mirror, or screen,

consciousness involves subjective experience.

Ātman, Jīva, Jīvātman — Advaita vs Dvaita

In Advaita Vedānta

Ātman is the only independent reality. It is unchanging, non-dual, non-doer, and the basis that enables existence and knowing. It is not an individual.

Jīva is the body–mind complex that appears as an individual experiencer. However, within strict human logic, a difficulty arises: if only an unchanging, non-doer reality exists, then how multiplicity and individuality appear through Māyā is not fully explainable.

Jīvātman is Ātman as associated with an individual through the mind. Due to ignorance (avidyā), it appears as if it is separate. Again, how ignorance itself arises when only non-dual reality exists is not fully explainable within human logic.

Thus, Advaita holds that one Ātman appears as many Jīvas, though this "appearance" remains logically unresolved.

In Dvaita

In Dvaita, Jīva, Jīvātman, and Ātman are considered the same.

Arguments Against Advaita

1. The Origin of Ignorance

If Brahman alone exists and is perfect,
how does ignorance arise?

Why would:
• absolute reality
appear as
• an illusory world?

Logical Tension

• If ignorance truly exists → Brahman is not completely perfect
• If ignorance does not exist → the appearance of the world becomes difficult to explain

This creates:
a philosophical tension that remains
unverifiable within human logic.

2. The World Problem

Advaita claims:
the world is an appearance within consciousness.

However:
reconciling:
• an unchanging reality
with
• a constantly changing world

is difficult within ordinary human logic.

Core Question

If Brahman never changes:
how does a changing universe appear within it?

Advaita Response

Advaita philosophers respond:
this contradiction arises because:
human logic operates only within empirical reality,
and cannot fully grasp the absolute.

Remaining Issue

This explanation again remains:
unverifiable within human logic and direct observation.

Independent Logical Assessment of Advaita

Advaita provides a powerful and elegant philosophical framework.

Strengths

• Explains unity of consciousness
• Avoids duality between subject and object
• Provides a direct path toward liberation

Limitations

It contains unresolved tensions between:
• an unchanging absolute reality
• a changing experiential world

Interpretation

Some interpret this as:
a limitation of human logic.

Others interpret it as:
a philosophical inconsistency.

3. Process-Based Theory (Buddhist Philosophy)

After examining:
• soul-based theories
• non-dual consciousness theories

we now turn to a third approach:
the process-based understanding of identity , which we discussed in detail in the previous chapter and will briefly revisit here.

This view is most clearly expressed in:

Buddhist philosophy

Core Principle

According to this framework:
there is no permanent self, soul, or fixed identity.

Instead:
what we call a "person" is:
a continuously changing process.

What Is Actually Found

Through direct observation, what is present?

Only:
• sensations
• thoughts
• emotions
• perceptions
• memories
• mental formations
• the sense "I am"

All of these:
• arise

• change
• disappear

No Separate Experiencer

Unlike soul-based theories,
this framework does not assume:
a separate entity behind experience.

Instead:
there is experience
but no independent experiencer to whom it belongs.

Dependent Origination

All experiences arise due to conditions.

These conditions include:
• sense organs
• external objects
• brain processes
• memory
• past conditioning
• environmental factors

Process Flow

Experience arises as:

contact
→ processing
→ sensation
→ reaction
→ memory

This is:
a dynamic chain, not a fixed entity. This is not a fixed sequence; these processes arise interdependently, often overlapping rather than occurring in a strict order.

The Sense of "Me"

The sense of "me" is also part of this process.

It arises due to:
• memory
• labelling
• identification
• continuity patterns

Key Characteristics of This Process

Everything observed is:
• dependent
• changing
• not under full control

Thus:

nothing qualifies as:
• a permanent self
• an independent experiencer
• a controller

Implication

What we call "self" is:
not an entity,
but a process of identification within experience , rather than a separate experiencer to whom experience happens.

Strength of This Framework

This model:
• aligns with direct observation
• does not require unverifiable entities
• explains change, continuity, and variation

Limitation

However, this framework also faces a difficulty.

It does not fully explain:
how subjective experience arises.

That is:
• how physical processes
• and mental events

give rise to:
felt experience.

4. Emergent Consciousness Hypothesis

Another explanation proposed in modern philosophy and neuroscience is:
consciousness emerges from brain activity.

Core Idea

According to this view:
• neurons interact through electrical and chemical signals

• these interactions generate patterns of information processing
• consciousness arises as a property of these complex processes

Strength of This View

This hypothesis explains:
why changes in the brain produce changes in experience.

It aligns with:
• anaesthesia
• brain injury
• neurological changes

The Hard Problem of Consciousness

However, this view introduces a major unresolved problem:

the hard problem of consciousness

Even if we understand:
every neural process in detail,
a fundamental question remains:

Why do these processes produce subjective experience?

Why does:
neural activity
feel like something from the inside?

Limitation

Thus:
materialist explanations also face unresolved difficulties.

They explain:
• structure
• function

But not fully:
subjective experience itself.

Independent Conclusion (Integrated Across All Views)

Across all examined frameworks:
• Soul-based theories (Dvaita)
• Non-dual theories (Advaita)
• Emergent theories (materialist view)
• Process-based theories (Buddhist view)

a common limitation appears:

None fully explain the complete mechanism by which subjective experience arises.

However — A Critical Logical Insight

Despite this limitation,
within the scope of human logic and direct observation,
one conclusion becomes clear:

A separate experiencer is not found

There is no identifiable entity:
to whom experience happens.

A separate doer is not found

There is no independent or partially independent controller:
who can fully determine outcomes.

This has been examined in detail in Chapter: Nirvana Explained.

Clarification to Avoid Misinterpretation

This conclusion does **not** mean:
• experience does not exist
• actions do not occur
• responsibility disappears

Instead, it means:

what we call:
• experiencing
• deciding
• acting

arises from:
a chain of interconnected conditions.

Refined Logical Position

Thus:

• experience exists
• processes exist
• conditions operate

But:

• no independent experiencer
• no independent controller

are established within experience.

On the Idea of "Experiencer as Subject"

A common counter-argument is:

“Even if the experiencer is not found as an object,
it exists as a subject.”

Logical Clarification

If such a subject cannot be distinguished from experience itself then it does not function as an separate experiencer within the field of experience.

And what is not known within experience cannot be felt, known, or suffered, and is therefore functionally irrelevant.

Further:

even the act of “knowing”:

• arises
• changes
• depends on conditions

Therefore:

there is no evidence of an

separate , unchanging knower to whom knowing happens.

On Responsibility and Action

This understanding does not remove responsibility.

Instead, it clarifies that:

responsibility and action arise through:

• necessity
• capability
• consequences
• conditioning
• and the self-referential model of the nervous system

Role of the Sense of “Self”

The sense of “self”:

• exists as a process
• is dependent
• is changing
• is not an independent controller

Yet it remains useful as a functional tool for:

• language
• coordination
• decision-making
• prioritization
• rapid threat response

Thus:

the "self" functions as a **process (verb)**,
not as an **entity (noun)**.

Final Resolution of the Question

The question:

"Who am I?"
does not resolve into a complete, end-to-end understanding of either the origin or the mechanism of consciousness.

Instead, it dissolves into a clearer understanding:

There is:
• a process
• a flow
• a chain of conditions

But:

there is no permanent identity behind it to whom experience arises.

What is called "I":

is not an entity.

It is a dependent, changing process
within experience.

Understanding this does not eliminate life.

It removes:

• the burden of a fixed identity
• the pressure of a controlling self

And opens the possibility of:

• clarity
• flexibility
• reduced suffering
• and a more direct relationship with reality.

Chapter 4

Ultimate Reality of the Universe

In this chapter, we will explore:

1.Ultimate Reality in Different Philosophical Traditions

2. Evaluation for and against existence of God

3. Evaluation for and against existence of Karmavāda and Rebirth

4.Comparative analysis across different philosophy on

a. Final Goal

b. Rebirth across lives

c. World structure

d. Time and Space

f. Universe Size

g. Moral law/karma

h. Heaven and Hell

i. Higher celestial beings

5.Why speculation is not necessary?

After examining the question "Who am I?", another profound question naturally arises:

What is the ultimate nature of the universe itself?

Human beings have always attempted to understand:

- the origin of existence
- the nature of consciousness
- the structure of reality
- the cause of order and suffering in the universe

Different philosophical and religious traditions provide different answers.

Some traditions claim that the universe is an expression of universal consciousness.

Some propose the existence of a personal creator God.

Others describe reality through impersonal causal processes.

Materialist philosophies explain the universe entirely in terms of fields, energy, matter, and natural laws.

Despite centuries of philosophical reflection and modern scientific investigation, the ultimate origin of existence remains uncertain.

This chapter examines the major explanations logically while recognizing the limits of current human knowledge.

1.Ultimate Reality Across Different Philosophical Traditions

Different philosophical systems describe ultimate reality in fundamentally different ways.

Advaita Vedānta

Advaita Vedānta proposes that ultimate reality is Brahman, described as **Sat–Chit–Ānanda**.

Sat (Existence)

Sat refers to pure existence.

Existence itself cannot be denied, because even denying existence presupposes the existence of something that performs the denial.

Advaita therefore proposes that existence itself is a fundamental dimension underlying all phenomena.

Chit (Consciousness)

Chit refers to consciousness or awareness.

Advaita philosophers argue that subjective awareness cannot be completely explained by physical processes alone. The brain may function as an instrument reflecting consciousness, but the capacity for awareness itself is considered fundamental.

Ānanda (Completeness)

Ānanda refers to completeness or fullness.

Since Brahman lacks nothing and depends on nothing, it is described as inherently complete.

In Advaita, Sat–Chit–Ānanda is not something Brahman has—it is what Brahman is.

Hence, it is not a property of Brahman, but its very nature.

Two famous statements from the Upanishads summarize this idea:

Tat Tvam Asi — "That Thou Art."

This suggests that the essential nature of individual consciousness is identical with ultimate reality.

Aham Brahmāsmi — "I am Brahman."

This does not imply personal omnipotence but indicates that the fundamental nature of awareness is not separate from the universal ground of existence.

Two Levels of Reality

Advaita distinguishes between two levels of reality:

Paramārthika (Absolute Reality)
Only Brahman exists.

Vyavahārika (Functional Reality)
The world appears due to ignorance (Māyā).

Vishishtadvaita Vedānta

Vishishtadvaita proposes that ultimate reality is a personal God whose cosmic body includes both souls and matter.

Souls remain distinct but inseparable from God, similar to cells within a living organism.

Liberation involves eternal communion with God while maintaining individuality.

Dvaita Vedānta

Dvaita philosophy teaches that three realities exist eternally and distinctly:

- God
- souls
- matter

God is completely independent, while souls and matter depend on Him.

Liberation means eternal proximity to God while remaining separate from Him.

Hindu Tantra (Śaiva–Śākta)

Non-dual Tantric traditions describe ultimate reality as the unity of consciousness and creative power, often symbolized as Śiva and Śakti.

In this view, the universe is not an illusion but a real manifestation of divine consciousness.

Jainism

Jain philosophy proposes a universe consisting of infinite individual souls and eternal matter.

Unlike theistic systems, Jainism does not propose a creator God.

Buddhism

Buddhist philosophy explains reality through dependent origination.

All phenomena arise through conditions.

Nothing exists as a permanent substance.

According to this view, the universe consists of processes rather than eternal entities.

Christianity and Islam

These traditions propose a personal creator God who created the universe and governs its moral order.

Human life is understood within a framework of divine creation, dependence on the divine, and ultimate judgment.

Sikhism

Sikh philosophy teaches that ultimate reality is **Ik Onkar** — a single, formless divine reality underlying the universe.

Human beings experience cycles of rebirth until union with the divine is realized.

Taoism

Classical Taoism describes ultimate reality as **Dao** — an impersonal generative principle underlying natural processes.

Rather than controlling the universe, the Dao represents the natural flow through which existence unfolds.

Charvaka (Lokāyata)

Charvaka philosophy proposes that matter alone exists and that consciousness arises from physical processes within the body.

However, original Charvaka texts are largely lost, so the precise philosophical structure of this tradition is not fully known.

2. Structural Challenges in Theistic Explanations

Many philosophical traditions propose that the universe was created and is governed by a personal God who possesses attributes such as:

• omnipotence (unlimited power)
• omniscience (complete knowledge)
• perfect benevolence (perfect goodness)

While this framework provides a coherent moral narrative, several logical questions arise when it is examined carefully.

These questions do not necessarily prove that God cannot exist beyond human logic.

However, it is not possible to establish this within human logic.

a. Problem of Evil

Logical Argument

If God is:

- omnipotent
- omniscient
- perfectly benevolent

then the existence of suffering becomes difficult to explain.

Human life contains many forms of suffering that appear unrelated to moral choice, including:

- natural disasters
- birth defects
- diseases
- famine and environmental destruction

If God created the universe with complete knowledge and unlimited power, the existence of such suffering raises philosophical questions about divine benevolence.

Counter-Arguments

Theistic traditions respond in several ways.

Some argue that suffering results from human free will. According to this explanation, moral evil arises because human beings misuse their freedom.

Others argue that suffering may serve purposes beyond human understanding and may contribute to a larger cosmic plan.

Some theologians propose that suffering provides opportunities for moral development or spiritual growth.

Independent Logical Assessment

These responses provide meaningful interpretations for believers.

However, from the perspective of human reasoning, several tensions remain.

Natural suffering—such as earthquakes, childhood illness, or genetic disorders—does not appear to result from human free will. Even rebirth cannot resolve this issue, and it will be discussed in the section on rebirth.

If God created the universe with complete knowledge of these events, their existence remains difficult to reconcile with perfect benevolence.

This does not prove that God cannot exist. It simply suggests that the traditional description of God as simultaneously omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly benevolent creates philosophical tension within human reasoning.

b. Problem of Prayer

Logical Argument

Many religious traditions encourage prayer as a means of influencing events through divine intervention.

However, this raises a philosophical question.

If the universe operates according to a perfect divine plan, then prayer should not change outcomes.

If prayer does change outcomes, the original plan appears incomplete.

Counter-Arguments

Some theologians argue that prayer itself is part of the divine causal structure. According to this view, God may have designed the universe so that certain events occur in response to prayer.

Others propose that prayer does not change external events but changes the internal state of the person praying.

Independent Logical Assessment

Prayer may indeed produce psychological benefits such as comfort, hope, and emotional resilience.

However, from a logical standpoint:

• if prayer changes external outcomes, the universe does not follow a fixed design
• if prayer does not change outcomes, God appears as a silent observer

This creates a philosophical tension within traditional theological frameworks.

c. Predetermination and Free Will

Logical Argument

If God possesses complete knowledge of the future, then the future appears predetermined.

If the future is predetermined, genuine human freedom becomes difficult to explain.

Counter-Arguments

Some philosophers argue that divine foreknowledge does not cause events. According to this view, God may know the future without determining it.

Independent Logical Assessment

Although this argument attempts to preserve both divine knowledge and human freedom, the tension between foreknowledge and freedom remains unresolved within human reasoning.

d. Does Order in the Universe Prove the Existence of God?

Some religious arguments claim that the order and complexity of the universe prove the existence of a divine designer.

However, the existence of order does not necessarily imply intentional design.

Two observations complicate this argument.

First Observation

The universe contains both order and disorder.

While natural laws produce structured phenomena such as planetary motion and biological systems, the universe also contains chaos and destruction, including:

• supernova explosions
• asteroid impacts
• natural disasters
• biological mutations

If order proves divine design, disorder would also require explanation within the same framework.

Second Observation

The anthropic principle provides another possible explanation.

The anthropic principle suggests that we observe the universe as compatible with life because only such a universe allows observers to exist.

In other words, if physical laws had been different, a different type of universe—or no observers at all—might have existed.

Therefore, the existence of life-supporting conditions does not necessarily prove intentional design.

It may simply reflect the conditions required for observers to arise.

e. Cause of God Problem

Another philosophical question concerns the origin of God.

If everything requires a cause, then God should also require a cause.

Theistic traditions often respond by stating that God is the uncaused foundation of reality.

However, if an uncaused reality is possible, then the universe itself could theoretically exist without a prior cause.

Therefore, the concept of God does not necessarily solve the problem of ultimate origin.

It simply relocates the question.

Independent conclusion on God:

The existence of God may lie beyond the limits of human logic; however, the specific characteristics attributed to God cannot be established within human reasoning and may represent an unnecessary layer of assumption.

f. Different realizations of great personalities:
Some may argue that God cannot be proven but can be realized by highly virtuous individuals. However, when we observe the differing realizations about God, as well as the relationship between God, the soul, and the world reported by various highly regarded individuals across human history, these accounts appear to vary significantly. This variation suggests that such realizations may reflect personal interpretation or belief rather than universally verifiable evidence. These variations in realization have been discussed in the section on ultimate reality across different philosophical traditions.

Theistic Philosophies (God-affirming)

Accept existence of a **personal or supreme divine reality**

- **Advaita Vedanta** *(Brahman as ultimate reality)*
- **Vishishtadvaita Vedanta**
- **Dvaita Vedanta**
- **Hindu Tantra**
- **Yoga** *(accepts Ishvara as special purusha)*
- **Christianity**
- **Islam**
- **Sikhism**

Non-theistic / Atheistic Philosophies

Do **not depend on a creator God** for explaining reality or liberation

- **Jainism**
- **Early Buddhism**
- **Zen Buddhism**
- **Religious Taoism**
- **Confucianism**

Important clarification

"Atheistic" here does **NOT mean denial of all spirituality**
It means:

- no **creator God required**
- reality explained through **process, law, or principles**

4. Arguments Against Rebirth and Karmavāda

Many philosophical traditions explain suffering and inequality through the doctrines of rebirth and karma. According to these doctrines, actions performed in previous lives determine circumstances in future lives.

However, when examined carefully, several logical and scientific questions arise.

1. Circular Reasoning

Rebirth is often used to explain present suffering, and present suffering is then used as evidence for rebirth.

This results in circular reasoning.

Instead of examining suffering through observable causes such as biology, psychology, environment, chance, and social structures, rebirth is assumed first and then used as an explanation.

A theory that proves itself by presupposing itself remains logically weak.

2. Karma–Body Dependency Problem

Karma requires action.
Action requires a body.

This creates a logical problem:

• If karma determines the body, how did karma occur before the body existed?
• If the body comes first, karma cannot determine the birth.

This tension remains unresolved in many karmic explanations.

3. Absence of Memory and Moral Justice

Punishment or reward without memory undermines the concept of moral justice.

If someone suffers in a new life without remembering the actions that caused it:

• learning cannot occur
• correction cannot occur
• moral meaning becomes unclear

Punishment without awareness becomes indistinguishable from randomness.

4. Governance Problem

If karmic consequences occur, who or what governs them?

Several possibilities exist:

If God governs karma
→ In that case, God, possessing an eternal will, must judge and assign outcomes, which raises questions about divine justice and leads to the problem of evil, as discussed above.

If karma governs itself
→ an unconscious process becomes responsible for morally appropriate outcomes.

If humans govern karma
→ no one would voluntarily choose suffering.

Each explanation introduces philosophical difficulties.

5. Ethical Concerns

Explaining suffering through past-life karma may unintentionally create ethical problems.

It may lead to:

• blaming victims for their suffering
• normalizing injustice
• weakening compassion

If suffering is explained entirely through past actions that cannot be remembered, empathy may decrease.

6. Lack of Scientific Evidence

At present, there is:

• no verified non-physical carrier of karma

Rebirth requires something that carries karmic consequences across lifetimes.

However, no such carrier has been conclusively established.

Possible candidates include:

• a soul — but the existence of a permanent soul remains unproven
• karmic tendencies — which are non-physical and undefined
• memory — which does not persist across lives
• consciousness — which has not been shown to continue independently after death

Without a clear carrier, the mechanism of rebirth remains uncertain.

• no reproducible proof of rebirth
• no confirmed mechanism of karmic transmission

While anecdotal claims exist, none have been consistently verified under rigorous scientific conditions.

7. Suffering Can Be Explained Without Rebirth

Many forms of suffering can be explained through observable causes such as:

• genetics
• neurobiology
• trauma
• conditioning
• social inequality
• probability and randomness

These explanations do not require the hypothesis of rebirth.

8. Practical Irrelevance to Liberation

Freedom from suffering does not necessarily require belief in rebirth.

Understanding the mechanisms of:

• craving
• attachment
• identity
• resistance

may be sufficient for reducing suffering within this life.

Therefore, belief in rebirth is not logically required for practical liberation.

How Can Karma Produce Consequences if It Is Not Conscious?

A central philosophical question arises in karmic theories:

If karma is not a conscious entity, how can it determine or "decide" the consequences of actions?

In most moral systems, consequences are administered by a conscious authority such as a judge or a divine being.

However, karmic doctrines often describe consequences arising automatically through causal processes.

Explanations of Karma in Different Philosophical Traditions

Theistic Hindu Systems (Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita)

In these traditions, karma itself does not independently produce results.

Instead, God administers karmic consequences.

The sequence is understood as:

Action → Karma → God assigns the appropriate result

In this framework:

God distributes consequences according to divine justice

This explanation resolves the problem of unconscious karma deciding outcomes because a conscious divine intelligence governs the results.

However, this introduces another philosophical difficulty.

If God administers karma, the existence of suffering must still be reconciled with divine justice and benevolence.

Thus, the problem of evil reappears within karmic theology.

Advaita Vedānta

Advaita does not treat karma as a conscious judge.

Instead, karma operates within Māyā, the cosmic order of cause and effect.

According to this view:

• actions produce karmic tendencies
• these tendencies influence future experiences

Karma therefore functions like a natural law.

However, critics point out a difficulty.

Physical laws such as gravity produce mechanical outcomes.

Karmic theory, however, appears to produce morally appropriate outcomes.

How a non-conscious causal system produces morally structured consequences remains philosophically debated.

Jainism

Jain philosophy presents one of the most detailed karmic explanations.

According to Jain thought:

Karma consists of extremely subtle material particles.
These particles attach to the soul through actions and intentions.
Over time, karmic matter accumulates and influences future experiences.

Thus, karmic consequences arise through an interaction between soul and subtle karmic matter.

However, this explanation raises another philosophical difficulty.

If the soul is non-physical, how does it interact with karmic particles that are considered subtle matter?

Jain philosophy responds by stating that the relationship between the soul and karmic matter is beginningless. In such a case, both would appear to have independent existence, which may introduce a potential tension with karmavāda **.**

Buddhism

Early Buddhist teaching defines karma primarily as intention (cetana).

The Buddha stated:
"It is intention that I call karma."

In this framework, karma does not operate as a cosmic judge.

Instead, intentional actions shape mental conditioning.

For example:

• repeated anger strengthens the habit of anger
• repeated compassion strengthens the tendency toward compassion

Thus, the first consequence of karma appears immediately within the structure of the mind.

Over time, these patterns influence perception, behaviour, and experience.

In Buddhist cosmology, karmic tendencies may also influence rebirth when appropriate conditions arise.

In Buddhism, karmic tendencies are understood to continue as conditioned processes, contributing to the arising of consciousness in a new life without the need for a permanent soul. They are not described as being stored anywhere after death. Rather, they arise in a new life when appropriate conditions are present, including parental factors and environment. This process is currently beyond complete verification within human logic.

The precise mechanism of this continuity remains philosophically debated.

Sikhism

Sikh philosophy teaches that karma influences the cycle of rebirth.

However, liberation ultimately depends on divine grace.

Thus, karma influences moral consequences but does not function independently of the divine.

Non-Theistic Natural Interpretations

Some modern interpretations treat karma simply as psychological and social causation.

In this interpretation:

• actions shape habits
• habits shape character
• character influences future outcomes

For example:

Habitual dishonesty may damage relationships and reputation.
Habitual generosity may strengthen trust and social support.

In this view, karmic consequences occur within observable social and psychological processes rather than through supernatural mechanisms.

Logical Assessment

These explanations demonstrate that different traditions attempt to resolve the problem of unconscious karma in different ways.

Theistic systems assign karmic consequences through God.
Advaita treats karma as part of cosmic causation.
Jainism describes karma as subtle material interaction.
Buddhism emphasizes psychological conditioning through intention.

However, several questions remain unresolved:

• How morally appropriate consequences arise without conscious judgment remains debated
• How karmic effects could operate across lifetimes remains uncertain
• How karmic processes function without detectable mechanisms remains unexplained

Modern science has not yet verified any of these mechanisms.

Balanced Conclusion

Karma provides a powerful ethical framework explaining how intentional actions influence human behaviour and well-being.

However, the precise mechanism by which karmic consequences arise—especially across lifetimes—remains uncertain.

Because the deeper nature of consciousness and causation is not fully understood, the possibility of unknown causal structures cannot be completely dismissed.

Nevertheless, from a scientific perspective, karmic consequences across lifetimes remain philosophical hypotheses rather than established laws of nature.

Final Goal of Human beings

Advaita Vedānta — Liberation is the realization that the individual self (Ātman) is identical with Brahman, the ultimate reality described as existence, consciousness, and completeness.

Non-dual Hindu Tantra (Śaiva–Śākta) — Liberation is the recognition that the individual self is identical with Śiva–Śakti. The universe is considered a real manifestation of divine consciousness rather than an illusion.

Vishishtadvaita Vedānta — Liberation means eternal communion with God while the soul remains distinct but inseparable from the divine.

Dvaita Vedānta — Liberation means eternal proximity to God while the soul remains completely distinct from Him.

Christianity — Salvation means eternal union with God and participation in divine life without becoming identical with God.

Islam — The final goal is eternal life in paradise in the presence of God while maintaining the distinction between creator and creation.

Sikhism — Liberation means union with the divine name and freedom from the cycle of rebirth.

Jainism — Liberation results in the perfected soul (Siddha) manifesting infinite knowledge, perception, bliss, and energy.

Early Buddhism — Nirvana is the permanent cessation of suffering and rebirth.

Zen Buddhism — Awakening occurs through direct realization of emptiness - that nothing has independent existence – along with freedom from attachment.

Yoga (Patañjali) — Liberation (Kaivalya) is the isolation of pure consciousness (Purusha) from nature (Prakriti).

Classical Taoism — The goal is living in harmony with the Dao rather than seeking eternal personal survival.

Religious Taoism — Spiritual immortality may arise through refinement of the spirit.

Confucianism — The aim is moral perfection and harmonious social order.

Charvaka — The goal is well-being and enjoyment within this life alone.

Soul Doctrine

Advaita — The individual self is ultimately identical with Brahman.

Vishishtadvaita — Multiple souls exist and remain distinct but inseparable from God.

Dvaita — Multiple souls exist and remain eternally distinct from God.

Hindu Tantra — The individual self is identical with Śiva.

Jainism — Infinite independent souls exist.

Early Buddhism — No permanent soul; only causal continuity of processes.

Zen Buddhism — Similar to early Buddhism.

Christianity — A created soul that lives one earthly life followed by judgment.

Islam — A created soul that lives one earthly life followed by judgment.

Sikhism — A soul created by God that undergoes rebirth until liberation.

Classical Taoism — Transformation of Qi rather than a permanent soul.

Religious Taoism — Spiritual continuity may occur but identity is not fixed.

Confucianism — A spirit concept exists but is not central to metaphysics.

Charvaka — No soul separate from the body.

Yoga — Multiple eternal Purushas (pure consciousness).

Rebirth Across Lives

Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Hindu Tantra, Yoga, Jainism, Sikhism — Affirm rebirth.

Early Buddhism and Zen — Affirm rebirth without a permanent soul. Rebirth occurs as the continuation of causal processes influenced by previous conditions.

Christianity and Islam — Reject rebirth.

Classical Taoism — Describes transformation of Qi rather than rebirth of the same identity.

Religious Taoism — Accepts rebirth but not an unchanging identity.

Confucianism — Does not emphasize rebirth.

Charvaka — Rejects rebirth.

World Structure

Cyclical universe — Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Hindu Tantra, Sikhism, Jainism, Early Buddhism, Zen, Religious Taoism, Yoga.

Single creation followed by final judgment — Christianity and Islam.

Eternal moral order — Confucian philosophy.

Eternal natural process — Classical Taoism.

Present-life focus — Charvaka philosophy.

Time and Space

Beginningless universe — Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Tantra, Jainism, Buddhism, Zen, Taoism, Confucianism, Charvaka, Yoga.

Created universe — Christianity, Islam, Sikhism.

Universe Size

Finite but vast — Jain cosmology and many theological interpretations within Christianity and Islam.

Infinite or beginningless — Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Hindu Tantra, Buddhism, Zen, Taoism, Yoga, Confucian cosmology, Charvaka.

Moral Law / Karma

Advaita — Karma operates within the domain of Maya.

Vishishtadvaita — Karma functions within divine order.

Dvaita — Karma operates but God remains the supreme authority.

Hindu Tantra — Karma functions within divine manifestation.

Jainism — Karma exists as subtle material particles binding the soul.

Buddhism / Zen — Karma functions as causal conditioning based on intention.

Christianity — Moral law governed by divine judgment rather than karma.

Islam — Moral law governed by divine judgment.

Sikhism — Karma exists but divine grace ultimately determines liberation.

Classical Taoism — Emphasis on harmony with the Dao rather than karma.

Religious Taoism — Moral retribution and rebirth may occur.

Confucianism — Moral order governed by the concept of Heaven (Tian).

Charvaka — No doctrine of karma.

Yoga — Karma operates within the interaction between Purusha and Prakriti.

Heaven and Hell

Affirmed in:

Advaita ,Vishishtadvaita , Dvaita , Hindu Tantra ,Yoga , Jainism , Early Buddhism , Zen, Christianity , Islam , Sikhism , Religious Taoism

Rejected or not emphasized in:

Classical Taoism , Confucianism , Charvaka

Higher Celestial Beings

Accepted in: Advaita ,Vishishtadvaita , Dvaita , Hindu Tantra ,Yoga , Jainism , Early Buddhism , Zen, Christianity , Islam , Sikhism , Religious Taoism; Confucian traditions

Rejected in : Charvaka philosophy.

Before concluding, it is useful to examine how philosophical traditions function in real social and developmental contexts.

Philosophy, Society, and Development: A Case Study from Hindu Traditions

Hinduism, Hindutva, and the Limits of Philosophy in Development

The word "Hindu" did not originally arise as the name of a religion. One widely accepted view is that the term 'Hindu' has a geographical origin, derived from the Sanskrit word 'Sindhu,' referring to the Indus River. Through linguistic transformation, 'Sindhu' became 'Hindu,' and the term initially referred to people living beyond this river. In this view, it did not denote a fixed religious identity or doctrine. Over time, the term came to represent a wide range of traditions that developed in the Indian subcontinent. These traditions include ritual practices, philosophical inquiry, and shared patterns of living. Unlike many organized religions, Hinduism does not have a single founder, a single central authority, or a single uniform doctrine. Because of this, it resists narrow definition.

This complexity has also been recognized in modern legal interpretation. The Supreme Court of India, in cases such as the Shastri Yagnapurushdasji vs Muldas Bhudardas Vaishya, observed that Hinduism cannot be confined within rigid doctrinal boundaries. It has been described as a "way of life" or a broad civilizational tradition. At the same time, it has been acknowledged that Hinduism is deeply rooted in the Indian subcontinent, where it evolved over a long historical period. This indicates that Hinduism is geographically grounded, yet not limited to a single belief system.

One of the most distinctive features of Hinduism is the coexistence of multiple philosophical systems within a shared framework. Traditions such as Dvaita, Advaita, and Vishishtadvaita offer fundamentally different interpretations of reality, self, and the world. These differences arise from varied interpretations of foundational texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, as well as from differing approaches to experience—some emphasizing devotion, others knowledge, and others synthesis. This plurality reflects an environment where inquiry was not restricted to a single authoritative conclusion.

The Vedic tradition itself shows a gradual evolution—from nature-oriented hymns, to ritual practices, and eventually to deep philosophical inquiry in the Upanishads. Questions such as "Who am I?" and "What is the nature of reality?" became central, marking a shift from external ritual toward internal understanding.

Despite this diversity, shared connections exist across large populations through shared philosophical texts, epics , sacred geography , and widely recognized cultural symbols.

Philosophical and scriptural traditions present a complex and multi-layered picture. Certain passages have been interpreted as supporting social classification and, in some readings, hierarchy, while other passages strongly emphasize unity, equality, and the accessibility of liberation to all.

However, historical and social practice has often diverged from philosophical ideals, with significant discrimination observed across caste, gender, and social status, including against women.

This indicates that scriptural interpretation, social conditions, and institutional structures interact in shaping lived reality. Therefore, neither philosophical texts alone nor social practice alone can fully represent the tradition. A balanced understanding requires recognizing both the diversity within the texts and the gap that may exist between philosophical insight and real-world application.

This leads to a deeper observation. While Hinduism provides a wide space for philosophical inquiry, philosophy alone does not determine the material or institutional development of a society. The presence of profound inquiry into questions of self, reality, and suffering does not automatically translate into scientific advancement or economic prosperity.

Social evils, economic backwardness, and lack of scientific development have been observed in certain segments across different religious traditions and are not restricted to any one religion. Social equality, prosperity, and scientific development depend on multiple interrelated conditions. Political stability, economic organization, systems of education, and a culture that encourages questioning and experimentation all play essential roles. Without these, even a tradition rich in philosophical insight may not produce corresponding progress in social equality, science, or material development.

The plural philosophical structure within Hinduism can reduce doctrinal rigidity and allow coexistence of different viewpoints. This may contribute to a relatively lower tendency toward uniform religious fanaticism. However, this openness in thought does not automatically eliminate social rigidity or ensure institutional efficiency.

Philosophy can influence direction by shaping values such as discipline, ethical conduct, and openness to reflection. It can reduce internal conflict and support more balanced living. But its role remains indirect. It prepares understanding; it does not, by itself, create systems of production, scientific inquiry, or governance.

Scientific development, in particular, requires conditions that go beyond philosophical insight. It depends on sustained investment, institutional support, openness to criticism, and a culture that values evidence and revision. These arise from coordinated political, economic, and cultural frameworks rather than from philosophy alone.

In modern discourse, Hindutva is often understood as an assertion of cultural and civilizational identity rooted in this broader Hindu tradition. It emphasizes continuity, preservation, and collective identity. However, like any identity-based framework, its impact depends on how it is interpreted and applied. Preservation of identity, by itself, does not guarantee progress unless it is accompanied by systems that support education, inquiry, and inclusive development.

In conclusion, Hinduism represents a vast and evolving spectrum of philosophical and cultural traditions. It demonstrates both openness in thought and complexity in practice. Its pluralism can reduce rigid doctrinal conflict, but philosophy alone is not sufficient to produce prosperity or scientific advancement. These arise only when philosophical insight is supported by effective political structures, economic organization, and a culture that encourages inquiry and application.

Limits of Knowledge, and the Practical Conclusion

After examining multiple philosophical and religious explanations of ultimate reality, one important observation becomes clear.

Despite thousands of years of inquiry, the deepest questions about existence remain unresolved.

Limits of Human Knowledge

Across all philosophical systems examined in this chapter, several questions remain open.

• The origin of the universe remains uncertain
• The ultimate nature of consciousness remains unclear
• The relationship between matter and awareness remains debated
• The question of whether existence has a first cause or an infinite chain of causes remains unresolved

Therefore, no philosophical or scientific system can currently claim complete certainty about ultimate reality.

Recognizing this limitation does not weaken human understanding.

Instead, it encourages intellectual humility.

Why Speculation Is Not Necessary for Peace

One of the most practical insights found in the teachings of the Buddha concerns the limits of metaphysical speculation.

Certain philosophical questions may remain unanswered without preventing the reduction of suffering.

Questions such as:

• whether the universe is eternal or not
• whether consciousness is fundamental or emergent
• whether existence has a first cause

may remain uncertain.

There is no need to have faith even in the metaphysical claims of Buddhism, such as rebirth, karmic tendencies, multiple realms, or divine vision, and it is not certain how many of these concepts were taught by the Buddha himself or were later added by his followers. However, the

practical utility of the Buddha's teachings—ethics, meditative cultivation, and wisdom—can be directly observed in the reduction, and in some cases even the cessation, of suffering.

Human suffering often arises from:

• craving
• attachment
• identification with changing experiences
• resistance to unavoidable reality

Understanding these psychological processes can reduce suffering even without solving the ultimate mysteries of the universe.

The Importance of Intellectual Honesty

Acknowledging the limits of knowledge allows a person to avoid two extremes.

One extreme is blind belief in explanations that cannot be verified.

The other extreme is cynical rejection of all philosophical inquiry. A balanced approach recognizes both the value of inquiry and the limits of current understanding.

This approach maintains openness while avoiding unnecessary dogmatism.

Practical Conclusion

These metaphysical principles cannot be proven within human logic. Instead of relying on blind faith, searching for root causes has led to the development of several scientific principles, such as quantum physics and the understanding of diseases, which have later been applied for human benefit.

Therefore, inquiry into cause and effect should not be stopped. However, engaging in speculative metaphysics without logical grounding often leads to no clear conclusion, and especially when it disturbs mental stability, it becomes of little use to oneself or others. Such speculation may be set aside when it has no practical role in the cessation of suffering.

Human beings may continue to explore the ultimate nature of reality.
Philosophy and science may eventually provide deeper understanding.

However, peace in life does not depend on solving every metaphysical question.

Chapter 5

Lie 1 of Peace — "We Are the Controller"

In this chapter, we will explore:

1. What Would a True Controller Mean?
2. Why Is There No Possibility of Free Will or a Controller?
3. No Controller Does Not Negate Action and Conditions
4. If There Is No Free Will, Is Improvement Still Possible?
5. The Consequences of Believing in a Controller
6. Neither an Independent Controller nor Absolute Randomness
7. Why Doesn't Society Collapse Even Without a Controller?

1. What Would a True Controller Mean?

The Illusion of Personal Control

One of the most deeply embedded beliefs in human psychology is the belief that:

"I am the controller of my actions and outcomes."

From childhood, people are taught that success and failure arise primarily from personal choice.

Work harder, and success will follow.
Choose wisely, and life will improve.
Make better decisions, and suffering will disappear.

This belief appears empowering, but careful examination reveals that it contains a fundamental problem.

Human beings are not sufficient controllers of their actions or outcomes.

Understanding this requires first defining what a true controller would mean.

A genuine controller would have the following capacities.

A controller would be an agent who can always select the better option whenever one exists, regardless of internal or external limitations.

Such an agent could always act differently under the same conditions.

If a person truly possessed this ability, several consequences would follow.

They would never repeatedly fall into patterns they themselves wish to avoid.
They would never act in ways that knowingly produce suffering for themselves.

However, human behaviour clearly does not function in this way.

People frequently make choices that later appear harmful.
They repeat habits they sincerely wish to stop.
They react emotionally despite intending to remain calm.

When harmful actions occur, they occur because the system did not have access to a better functioning response at that moment.

Fear may have dominated.
Conditioning may have overridden reasoning.
Limited information may have shaped perception.
Emotional overwhelm may have reduced clarity.

Thus, the system acted according to the best capacity available at that moment.

The inability to choose happiness independent of conditions shows that we are neither an independent controller nor even a partial one.

2. Why Is There No Possibility of Free Will or a Controller?

Free Will Across Philosophical Traditions

Across philosophical traditions, different models have been proposed to explain human action, freedom, and control. These can be broadly grouped into the following categories.

1. Determinism / Fatalism

In deterministic or fatalistic views, all events are fixed by prior causes or by an inevitable order. Outcomes are seen as unavoidable. However, even here, events unfold through actions and conditions. What is denied is not action itself, but the existence of an independent controller behind action.

This view is most clearly represented by Ajivika, which held that all events are governed by an unalterable order.

2. Absolute Freedom

Some views propose that human beings possess complete freedom independent of prior causes. However, such freedom cannot be demonstrated. Any action must either arise from prior conditions or from randomness. If it arises from conditions, it falls into determinism; if not, it becomes random and therefore not under control. Thus, absolute freedom does not establish a true controller.

This position is only loosely associated with Charvaka . Charvaka does not explicitly formulate a theory of absolute free will, but by rejecting karma, rebirth, and unseen causal structures, it leaves room for a more immediate, seemingly unconstrained view of action. However, it does not systematically defend freedom independent of conditions, which is why it only loosely fits this category.

3. God-Controlled Conditionality

In this view, actions, karma, and prayer exist, but outcomes are ultimately governed by an all-knowing or controlling God. If such a principle governs all outcomes, then events unfold according to that higher order, leaving no independent control at the individual level. Actions remain, but as part of a divinely governed process.

This view is represented by traditions such as Dvaita Vedanta, Vishishtadvaita, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam.

4. Process-Dependent Conditionality

Here, actions arise through interdependent conditions such as perception, intention, environment, and past influences. While this framework emphasizes process rather than fixed fate, if all conditions depend on prior conditions, the unfolding remains determined. What appears as choice is part of a structured causal process.

This view is clearly seen in Early Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Jainism, Classical Taoism, Confucianism, and Yoga.

5. Mixed Process and Divine

Some systems combine causal processes with divine influence, where both disciplined practice and grace are emphasized. However, both process and divine intervention operate within a structured unfolding, leaving no independent controller.

This combined approach is characteristic of Hindu Tantra.

6. Transcendental View

In non-dual frameworks such as Advaita Vedanta, the entire structure of causation, action, and individuality is ultimately considered unreal. The question of control does not resolve into determinism or randomness but dissolves entirely, as there is no separate entity to control or be controlled.

7. Randomness

Some interpretations allow for events that are not determined by prior causes. However, randomness does not establish control. If an outcome is uncaused, it is not governed by an agent and therefore cannot be controlled. Randomness removes determinism but does not introduce a controller.

No major classical philosophical tradition fully grounds itself in pure randomness as a complete explanatory framework. Randomness , as a serious explanatory concept , mainly arises in modern scientific theories – especially in Quantum Mechanics.

8. Compatibilism

Compatibilist views redefine freedom as acting according to one's internal states without coercion, even if those states arise from prior causes. While this preserves a functional notion of

freedom, those internal states themselves are conditioned. Thus, this view does not establish an independent controller but describes conditioned functioning.

This position is most clearly articulated in modern philosophy, with partial parallels in traditions such as Stoicism.

Stoicism is only a partial parallel to compatibilism because, while both operate within determinism, compatibilism preserves freedom as acting according to one's internal state without coercion, whereas Stoicism dissolves freedom into acceptance of fate. In both cases, however, they ultimately reduce to determinism.

Final Synthesis

Across all these views, a common pattern emerges.

- If events arise from prior causes, the unfolding is determined.
- If events arise without causes, they are random and not controllable.
- If governed by a divine principle, outcomes follow that governing order.
- If causation itself is denied, as in transcendental views, the notion of a controller dissolve entirely.

Thus, all frameworks—except randomness and transcendental non-duality—ultimately align with determinism, leading to a fixed outcome when analysed in terms of dependence. Even in those exceptions, no independent controller is established.

3. No Controller Does Not Negate Action and Conditions

At the same time, none of these views deny the role of action and conditions. **In every framework, outcomes unfold through actions, processes, and conditions. Action is never bypassed; it remains the medium through which results manifest.**

At any moment, human action emerges from a complex system of interacting conditions.

These conditions include:

• genetics
• early upbringing
• education
• cultural environment
• past experiences
• emotional states
• brain chemistry
• social pressure
• physical health
• available information

Even intention itself arises from these conditions.

When a person decides to act in a certain way, that decision does not appear from nowhere.

It emerges from the interaction of many factors shaping the nervous system at that moment.

Thus, action arises from conditions rather than from an independent controller.

Even if one adopts the view that nothing is in our control, it does not lead to inactivity. Conditions such as pain, risk, and harmful consequences arise, and these conditions are often intolerable. The movement to reduce or avoid harm—whether through action or non-action—also arises as part of the same unfolding of conditions.

This means that even the stance, "I will not act because nothing is in my control," is itself just another arising within conditions. If harmful consequences are present or anticipated, responses such as withdrawal, protection, planning, or restraint naturally occur. These responses are not chosen by an independent controller; they are compelled by the conditions themselves.

Therefore, action cannot be escaped. Whether one acts or refrains, both are forms of unfolding within conditions. The impulse to prevent harm, and the ways in which prevention occurs, are not under personal control but are expressions of the same process.

Will still exists.
Preferences exist.
Intentions exist.
Effort exists.
Planning exists.
Responsibility exists.

However, these functions arise within conditions rather than belonging to an independent controller.

The body and brain are systems embedded within causal networks.

Genetics influence temperament.
Environment shapes learning.
Experience modifies perception.

Thus, what we call "my will" emerges from conditions rather than from an independent author.

This leads to an important insight.

Will exists, but the controller of will does not exist as an independent entity.

4. If There Is No Free Will, Is Improvement Still Possible?

Conditions Shaping Conditions

Because actions arise through conditions, change also occurs through conditions.

For example:

Anger arises → awareness arises → speech softens.
Fear arises → breathing slows → stability increases.
Craving arises → insight arises → craving weakens.
Collapse arises → compassion arises → recovery may become possible.

A person who grows up in an environment that values education is more likely to value learning.
A person exposed to suffering may develop compassion.
A person repeatedly trained in mindfulness may develop emotional regulation.

This explains why education, therapy, and meditation practices can change human behaviour.

Each of these factors introduces new conditions into the system.

These conditions then influence future actions.

These shifts do not require an independent commander directing them.

They occur because conditions influence other conditions.

Repeated practice strengthens beneficial responses.

Supportive environments stabilize emotional regulation.

Teachers and mentors can guide individuals toward healthier patterns of thinking and acting.

Thus, improvement occurs not because of an independent controller, but because of better conditions shaping the system.

Skill gradually replaces confusion.
Clarity replaces reactive patterns.

Thus, the absence of a controller does not make improvement impossible.

Instead, it shows how improvement occurs.

Thus, growth remains possible even without a personal controller.

5. The Consequences of Believing in a Controller

The belief in a personal controller may appear harmless.

However, it quietly creates several forms of suffering.

Self-blame arises when outcomes are negative.
Arrogance arises when outcomes are positive.
Hatred toward others arises when their actions cause harm.

These reactions depend on the assumption that individuals could always have acted differently.

If that assumption is mistaken, many forms of psychological suffering lose their foundation.

This insight will be explored further in the next section.

6. Neither an Independent Controller nor Absolute Randomness

When the belief in a controller collapses, two mistaken conclusions often appear.

One mistake is the belief that everything must therefore be random.

Another mistake is the belief that everything is controlled by an independent agent.

Neither conclusion accurately reflects how experience unfolds.

The claim that human beings are not independent controllers often creates immediate resistance.

Many people assume that if no controller exists, life must become random or chaotic.

However, this conclusion is incorrect.

The absence of a personal controller does not imply absolute randomness.

Instead, it reveals the deeper structure of reality: conditional causality.

Reality operates through conditional causality.

In conditional causality, one condition influences another in a specific way.

Events arise when the necessary conditions align.

For example:

A seed grows into a tree when soil, water, sunlight, and temperature align.

Remove any of these conditions, and the growth changes or stops.

Similarly, human behaviour arises through interacting psychological and biological conditions.

Emotion influences perception.
Perception influences thought.
Thought influences action.

Even if uncaused randomness exists, it becomes part of the conditions through which the outcome unfolds.

Thus, actions are neither controlled by an independent self nor arising from absolute randomness.

They arise from structured interactions among conditions.

7. Why Doesn't Society Collapse Even Without a Controller?

The belief that "I am the controller" silently shapes many forms of psychological suffering.

When this belief collapses—not as a philosophical theory but as a clear observation—several deep shifts occur naturally.

These shifts affect how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to society.

Understanding these changes reveals why recognizing the absence of a controller does not necessarily eliminate responsibility, but instead removes unnecessary psychological suffering.

How Does This Understanding Eliminate Self-Blame?

Self-blame is not created by pain itself. It is created by a specific accusation within the mind: "I could have chosen differently, and I failed." This accusation assumes that a fully capable controller existed who had access to a better option. However, once it becomes clear that actions arise from conditions rather than from an independent or partial controller, this accusation loses its foundation. At any given moment, a person acts with the capacity available to them at that time. That capacity depends on many conditions:

• perception
• emotional stability
• available information
• physical state
• past conditioning
• environmental pressure

If a better response had truly been available within the system at that moment, it would have occurred. No person deliberately chooses an option that destroys their own peace when a clearly better option exists within their capacity. When harmful actions occur, they occur because the system lacked access to a better functioning response at that moment. This understanding does not excuse harmful behaviour. However, it dissolves the illusion of a powerful inner controller who could always have acted perfectly. Thus, self-blame collapses not through denial but through clarity. What remains is learning rather than condemnation.

How Does This Understanding Prevent Hatred Toward Others?

Hatred toward others arises from a similar assumption. The mind believes: "They could have chosen differently and deliberately chose harm." This belief assumes that the other person possessed full control over their behaviour. Once this assumption collapses, hatred loses its fuel. People begin to see that others act within limited capacities shaped by their conditions. These conditions may include:

• fear
• trauma
• cultural conditioning
• ideology
• emotional instability
• lack of awareness
• biological influences

Recognizing these factors does not mean that harmful behaviour becomes acceptable. However, it changes the emotional response from hatred to understanding. Instead of viewing another person as a fully free villain, we see a human system functioning within limited conditions. This shift removes emotional hatred while still allowing responsible responses.

Punishment Without Hatred

Understanding the absence of a controller does not eliminate the need for consequences. Society still requires order and protection. People who harm others must still face consequences. However, punishment no longer needs to be driven by hatred. Punishment becomes a practical necessity rather than emotional revenge. Society restrains dangerous individuals in order to:

- protect others
- prevent repetition
- maintain social stability

This response resembles how society deals with other forms of danger. A dangerous animal may be restrained. A contagious disease may be isolated. These actions are taken for protection rather than for revenge. Similarly, a criminal may be punished not because society hates them but because their behaviour threatens the safety of others. This shift transforms justice from emotional retaliation into functional protection.

The Difference Between Hatred and Boundaries

Hatred and boundaries are often confused. Hatred says: "You deserve suffering because you could have been better." Boundaries say: "This behaviour cannot continue." Hatred seeks emotional satisfaction. Boundaries seek safety and stability. A society operating through boundaries rather than hatred becomes more balanced and effective. Decisions become clearer. Punishments become proportional. Justice becomes focused on protection rather than revenge.

Structural Compassion

This understanding creates a unique form of compassion. It is not sentimental compassion. It does not ignore wrongdoing. Instead, it recognizes the structural limitations within human behaviour. This compassion says: "I do not hate you, but I will stop you." It resembles the attitude of a surgeon performing a necessary operation. The action may be firm and decisive, but it is not motivated by hatred. Such compassion remains strong, clear, and practical. It protects others while recognizing the limitations within human behaviour.

The Collapse of Pride

Just as self-blame collapses, so does excessive pride. Pride depends on the belief that success arises solely from personal choice. However, success also arises from conditions. Intelligence depends partly on genetics and education. Opportunity depends partly on environment and timing. Resilience depends partly on upbringing and support systems. Recognizing this does not eliminate achievement. People can still develop skills and accomplish meaningful goals. However, arrogance fades because the idea of complete personal authorship becomes unrealistic. Humility replaces pride. Thus, the collapse of the controller illusion produces three major psychological shifts: self-blame dissolves, hatred toward others dissolves, and arrogant pride dissolves. Yet, conditional responsibility and accountability remain, arising from conditions rather than from an independent controller.

Understanding this prepares us for the next question. If no controller exists, why does society—and the individual—continue to function rather than collapsing into chaos?

Responsibility Without a Controller

A common fear arises when people first encounter the idea that no independent controller exists. They worry that without a controller:

• responsibility will disappear
• effort will collapse
• society will become chaotic

However, careful observation shows that these fears are unfounded. Human systems do not depend on an imaginary controller in order to function. They depend on conditions.

7.Why doesn't society collapse even when there is no controller?

Society operates through systems of cause and effect. Laws exist because actions have consequences. Education exists because learning changes behaviour. Healthcare exists because treatment improves physical conditions. None of these systems require belief in an independent controller. They function through predictable relationships between actions and outcomes. For example: a person studies because exams require preparation; a parent protects a child because biological bonding creates responsibility; a society restrains criminals because safety requires protection from harm. In each case, behaviour arises from conditions rather than from metaphysical free will. Consequences still operate. Learning still occurs. Correction still happens. Thus, social order continues even without assuming an independent controller.

The Functional Self Still Exists

The collapse of the controller illusion does not eliminate the functional sense of self. The biological and psychological system still functions. The organism still performs important activities such as planning, learning, protecting itself and others, maintaining relationships, and improving skills. The practical "I" used in everyday language continues to function. What disappears is the imagined controller who could always have acted differently in the past. This distinction is important. The functional self remains. The imagined controller dissolves. Once this illusion disappears, energy previously spent on guilt and self-condemnation becomes available for learning and adaptation.

Responsibility Without Guilt

Responsibility continues to operate through feedback and consequences. When harmful behaviour occurs, correction becomes necessary. Learning remains essential. Accountability remains necessary for social functioning. However, guilt based on the belief in an independent controller begins to dissolve. Guilt says: "I should have been capable of acting better in that moment." But if actions arise from conditions, the more accurate question becomes: "What conditions produced this behaviour?" and "What conditions can reduce this behaviour in the future?" This shift replaces self-punishment with constructive learning. Responsibility remains, but psychological cruelty toward oneself disappears.

Peace Through the End of Inner Conflict

Much psychological suffering arises from arguing with the past.

The mind repeatedly says:

"It should have been different."
"I should have acted differently."
"I should have been stronger."

These thoughts assume the existence of a powerful inner controller who failed to act correctly.

Once the illusion of that controller collapses, the argument with the past loses its foundation.

Events still occur.
Pain still occurs.

However, the internal prosecution stops.

Peace does not mean the absence of pain.

Peace means the absence of unnecessary inner conflict about what has already happened.

This shift does not produce emotional numbness.

Instead, it produces a quieter relationship with experience.

Why Is Excellence Still Admired?

Another concern arises.

If actions arise from conditions rather than personal authorship, why does society still admire bravery, intelligence, or skill?

The answer lies in rarity.

Certain combinations of conditions produce exceptional outcomes.

A person with extraordinary discipline, talent, or courage represents a rare configuration of conditions.

Society values these rare configurations because they benefit collective life.

Admiration, therefore, does not depend on the belief that individuals created themselves from nothing.

Admiration reflects recognition of beneficial qualities emerging through complex conditions.

Thus, respect and inspiration remain meaningful even without the myth of independent authorship.

The Deeper Freedom

Understanding the absence of a controller produces a paradoxical form of freedom.

Freedom does not come from controlling everything.

Freedom comes from releasing the impossible burden of controlling everything.

Once this burden dissolves:

• guilt becomes lighter
• hatred weakens
• arrogance fades
• energy returns to practical living

Life continues exactly as before in many external ways.

People still work, learn, protect, and create.

But internally, the struggle to maintain the illusion of perfect control disappears.

Final Insight

The belief that "I am the controller" is one of the deepest misconceptions shaping human suffering.

When this belief collapses, responsibility remains, but unnecessary psychological suffering dissolves.

This insight leads directly back to the central principle of this book.

Peace in Action can be summarized in one practical principle:

Act when action is possible.

Accept painful experience without resistance when action is not possible.

Remain rooted in ethics, mindfulness and wisdom.

When this understanding matures, life is no longer lived for a separate self-seeking fulfilment.

Instead, life unfolds as a natural process arising through conditions—allowing compassion, stability, and peace to arise.

Chapter 6: Lie 2 of Peace — "Peace Means Stillness Even in Danger"

Truth

Peace is the absence of inner conflict. It includes allowing disturbance when disturbance is required, rather than resisting it in order to appear calm.

In this chapter, we will gain clarity on:

1. Why peace does not mean stillness—even in danger
2. Understanding the distinction between pleasure, happiness, joy, bliss, peace, ānanda, and Nirvana.
3. Why awakened beings like the Gautama Buddha may or may not act in danger—but not for protecting a personal identity

1. Why Peace Does Not Mean Stillness — Even in Danger

A common misunderstanding about peace is the belief that peace means the absence of movement, urgency, or disturbance.

This misunderstanding often arises from spiritual literature, where peace is described using images of silence, still lakes, or unmoving mountains. Over time, these metaphors are taken literally rather than understood as illustrative.

As a result, people begin to assume that if they are truly peaceful, they should remain calm, slow, and composed—even in situations of danger.

However, this expectation misunderstands both human biology and the nature of peace.

Peace does not mean stillness.
Peace means the absence of inner conflict with what is happening.

Action and peace belong to different layers of functioning:

- Action belongs to the nervous system responding to conditions
- Peace belongs to the absence of psychological resistance to those conditions

Thus, a body may run, shout, fight, or escape while the mind remains free from inner conflict.

Stillness is not required irrespective of conditions.

2. The Nervous System Is Designed for Movement in Danger

Human biology has evolved to respond rapidly to threat.

When danger appears:

- the heart rate may increase
- breathing may become faster

- muscles may contract
- attention may narrow
- movement may become rapid and focused

These reactions are not necessarily signs of psychological weakness.
They may simply be functional survival processes inherent to the nervous system.

Expecting complete stillness during danger is like expecting silence during a fire alarm. It misunderstands the purpose of the system.

The body moves because movement protects life.
Peace is not violated by this movement.

Peace is disturbed only when the mind begins resisting the fact that such movement is occurring.

Examples of such inner conflict include:

- "I should remain calm."
- "A spiritual person would not react."
- "I must not feel this."
- "Why is this happening to me?"

These thoughts create a second layer of suffering.

The body responds naturally to conditions.
The mind then resists or evaluates that response.

Peace collapses not because the body moves, but because the mind resists reality.

3. Peace Is Compatibility With Reality

Peace exists when the mind no longer opposes the fact:
"This is what is happening now."

If the situation requires stillness, peace allows stillness.
If the situation requires movement, peace allows movement.
If the situation requires intense effort, peace allows effort.
If no action is possible, peace allows the situation to unfold without resistance.

Action is undertaken as part of the functioning of an impersonal process, not to fulfil a separate experiencer or under the control of a separate entity.

Peace is therefore compatibility with reality, not control over reality.

When danger appears, a peaceful response may include:

- running away from threat
- protecting another person

- shouting for help
- physically defending oneself

These actions are not disturbances of peace.
They are expressions of intelligence responding to conditions.

What disturbs peace is the belief that one must remain calm even when reality demands action.

4. A Calm Body Is Not Required for Peace

Many people believe that peace requires:

- slow breathing
- relaxed muscles
- quiet emotions
- a composed appearance

These conditions may accompany certain states, but they are not the definition of peace.

Stillness may sometimes be present as part of peace, but suppressing natural responses in order to appear still is neither genuine stillness nor peace.

In genuine danger, the body may:

- tremble
- sweat
- breathe rapidly
- move intensely

None of these conditions destroy peace by themselves.

They remain at the level of conditioned physiological response and do not necessarily become psychological suffering unless identification arises.

For example, when withdrawing the hand from fire, the movement is immediate and intense, yet there is no identification such as "I am in danger"—only a functional response. Even if the thought 'I am afraid' continues over time, it is recognized as a conditioned experience, not as indicating the existence of a separate experiencer to whom it happens."

Peace disappears only when the mind resists these reactions.

If the reaction is allowed without identification, peace remains.
If the mind adds resistance, conflict appears.

5. Why Expecting Stillness in Danger Is a Category Error

Expecting stillness in danger is similar to expecting:

- silence during a fire alarm

- relaxation during surgery
- stillness while falling

These expectations confuse two distinct domains:

- biological response systems
- psychological states

The nervous system responds to conditions.
Peace refers to the absence of conflict with those responses.

When these are confused, individuals attempt to suppress natural biological reactions in order to maintain an image of calmness.

This suppression leads to rigidity and unnecessary suffering.

True peace does not suppress biology.
It remains aligned with reality.

6. Distinguishing Emotional States

To understand peace clearly, it is necessary to distinguish it from other commonly confused experiences. These states may appear similar on the surface, but they differ fundamentally in their structure, dependency, and stability.

Pleasure

Pleasure arises from contact with favourable stimulation.

Examples include:

- enjoyable food
- physical comfort
- praise or recognition
- sensory enjoyment
- excitement

Pleasure is dependent on specific conditions.
When those conditions are present, pleasure arises; when they are absent, pleasure fades or turns into discomfort.

Because of this dependency:

- pleasure is unstable
- it easily leads to craving
- it often creates attachment to repetition

However, since pleasure is not always available according to our wishes, and even when it is available it may involve significant stress for brief moments of thrill, and since we may not belong to the small group of individuals who can attain and sustain it consistently throughout life, pleasure is inherently unreliable as a foundation for peace.

Happiness

Happiness is more stable than pleasure but still conditional.

It often arises from:

- security
- health
- supportive relationships
- predictable environments
- a sense of stability in life

Happiness appears broader and more enduring than momentary pleasure. However, it still depends on favourable circumstances.

Because of this:

- happiness carries a subtle background insecurity
- the mind knows these conditions may change
- therefore, a subtle anxiety or tension may remain

Happiness is more refined than pleasure, but it is not independent of conditions.

Joy

Joy is a form of pleasure combined with rising energy.

It often appears in situations such as:

- celebration
- creative expression
- meaningful connection
- discovery or insight

Joy has an expansive and dynamic quality.
It feels uplifting and energizing.

However:

- it still depends on conditions
- it is not stable

- it rises and falls

Thus, joy is an elevated state, but not equivalent to peace.

Bliss

Bliss is characterized by deep pleasantness combined with ease and stillness.

It often arises during:

- meditation
- profound relaxation
- states of absorption

In bliss:

- the body feels light
- the mind feels settled
- there is a sense of comfort and ease

Bliss is more stable than pleasure and joy, but it still depends on particular internal or external conditions.

Therefore:

- bliss can arise
- bliss can fade
- it cannot be maintained permanently

Bliss is often mistaken for peace, but they are not the same.

Peace

Peace is fundamentally different from all the previous states.

Peace is not a feeling produced by favourable conditions.
Peace is the absence of inner conflict with experience.

Peace does not require:

- pleasure
- comfort
- stability
- stillness

Peace can coexist with:

- pain

- urgency
- discomfort
- uncertainty
- fear-like sensations at the level of the body

In peace, sensation may remain, but resistance ceases—even when no action is possible to resolve the situation.

Specifically, the disappearance of thoughts such as:

- "This should not be happening"
- "I must change this immediately"
- "This experience is unacceptable"

Peace does not depend on controlling life.
It depends on the absence of inner argument with reality.

Thus:

- pain may remain
- movement may remain
- intensity may remain

But psychological suffering does not arise in the absence of resistance and identification.

Ānanda

Ānanda is not an experience that can be produced deliberately.
Ānanda refers to a deeper sense of completeness described in Hindu philosophical traditions such as Advaita and Dvaita. It is the natural expression of the cessation of seeking, arising through grace.

In Dvaita, grace is understood as the blessing of God, upon whom everything depends and through whom all events occur. In Advaita, grace is the dissolution of the illusion of 'Aham'—the misidentification of oneself as a separate entity distinct from the universe—which drives the continuous search for fulfilment through experience. This dissolution is not brought about by an individual agent, but unfolds through universal consciousness, which is not a doer but the underlying basis of all that appears.

Nirvana

Nirvana is the realization of the absence of a separate experiencer and independent controller, resulting in the cessation of identification with actions, intentions, and experiences, and thereby the cessation of mental suffering. The path to Nirvana comprises ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

It is the cessation of ignorance and the end of seeking fulfilment through experience, since no separate experiencer exists to be fulfilled. Actions, intentions, and experiences continue to arise dependent on conditions.

As previously clarified, Nirvana is not an experience; therefore, it neither arises nor ceases. It is an unshakable peace revealed with the cessation of suffering. Although this peace may appear phenomenologically similar to other peaceful states, it is ontologically distinct, as it is not condition-dependent. This peace is not condition-dependent, because the identification with a seeker—who depends on conditions to experience peace—has ceased.

Avoiding and Not Avoiding Danger: The Case of the Buddha

A common misunderstanding arises when examining the life of the Gautama Buddha.

If peace is compatible with action:

- Why did he sometimes remain still in dangerous situations?
- Why did he sometimes avoid danger?

This confusion arises from attempting to derive fixed behavioural rules from observed actions.

Observed Patterns in the Buddha's Life

Situations Where the Buddha Did Not Avoid Danger

In certain accounts:

- he remained still in the presence of threats such as Angulimala
- he did not react with visible panic
- he did not attempt to escape impulsively

These examples are often misinterpreted as proof that peace requires stillness.

However, this interpretation is incomplete.

Situations Where the Buddha Avoided Danger

In other situations:

- he avoided hostile environments
- he did not expose the body unnecessarily to harm
- he left places where conditions were not supportive

These actions demonstrate practical intelligence and responsiveness.

Key Insight: No Fixed Rule of Behaviour

When both patterns are considered together, a clear conclusion emerges:

There is no fixed rule such as:

- "Always remain still in danger"
- "Always escape danger"

Instead:
Action or non-action arises based on conditions.

Why This Does Not Contradict Peace

The critical factor is not the action itself, but whether there is identification with a separate experiencer.

In an ordinary person:

- action may arise with identification ("I must survive")
- inaction may also arise with identification ("I must stay still even in danger")

In realization:

- action is not performed to protect a psychological identity
- inaction is not the result of suppression

Thus:
The absence of inner conflict—not behaviour—is the defining feature of peace.

Why Running or Staying Is Not the Criterion of Peace?

It is a mistake to treat physical behaviour as the measure of inner freedom.

Consider:

- a person may remain still while internally conflicted
- a person may run while free from psychological conflict

Therefore:

- stillness does not prove peace
- movement does not destroy peace

The nervous system may act differently depending on conditions.

Peace lies in the absence of resistance to those actions.

Lesson for Practical Life

For most individuals:

- the body will react to danger
- sensations may arise

- action may become intense

Peace does not require suppressing these responses.

Peace requires:

- not resisting what is arising
- not identifying with the experience

Thus:

- if running occurs, it can occur without inner conflict
- if stillness occurs, it can occur without inner conflict

Final Insight

The examples from the life of the Gautama Buddha do not establish a rule of stillness. They reveal a deeper principle: action and non-action both arise conditionally, while peace remains when there is no inner conflict and no identification with a separate experiencer.

Therefore, running or remaining still is not the criterion of peace. The defining characteristic is the absence of inner conflict, which follows from the absence of identification, supported by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

Chapter 7: Lie 3 of Peace — "All Desire Must Be Destroyed"

Truth:
Peace does not require the destruction of all desire.
Peace requires understanding the nature, limits, and reliability of desire.

After reading this chapter, we will gain clarity on:

1. **Why the idea that all desire must be destroyed is a misunderstanding?**
2. **The difference between skilful desire and unskilful craving**
3. **Why Desire Cannot Guarantee Fulfilment?**
4. **Importance of repetition and the formation of tendencies and dispassion**
5. **Why even the Buddha did not eliminate all forms of functional desire**
6. **Whether Buddha can kill to protect an innocent person?**
7. **Does Buddha justify non-violence while allowing non-vegetarian food?**
8. **Why the Buddha Denied Sensual indulgence? How Monks destroyed lust?**
9. **If a deliberate lie could save multiple innocent lives , should the Buddha have lied?**
10. **Illustration of Desire Through a Practical Example**

1. Why the idea that all desire must be destroyed is a misunderstanding?

The Misunderstanding About Desire

Many spiritual traditions contain statements that appear to condemn desire completely.

Statements such as:

• "Desire is the root of suffering."
• "Freedom requires the end of desire."
• "Craving must be eliminated."

Over time, these statements have often been interpreted in an extreme way:

that peace requires the complete absence of all desire.

This interpretation creates confusion.

If taken literally, it would mean that a peaceful person would have no motivation to:

• eat
• drink water
• protect life
• help others

• learn
• act responsibly

But this is clearly not how life functions.

Human existence operates through motivation.

Without any form of desire, biological life could not continue even for a short time.

Therefore, the claim that "all desire must disappear" cannot be correct in a literal sense.

The real issue is not the existence of desire.

The real issue is the relationship between desire and peace.

Desire Is a Natural Biological Function

Desire is not merely a psychological weakness.

It is part of the structure of life.

Desire drives essential processes such as:

• hunger leading to eating
• thirst leading to drinking
• curiosity leading to learning
• care leading to the protection of others

These motivations support the stability of living systems.

Even the simplest organisms move toward favourable conditions and away from harmful ones.

Therefore, desire is not an accidental flaw.

It is a structural feature of biological life.

If desire were completely eliminated, life itself would collapse.

The real question therefore becomes:

Which desires support stability, and which desires create unnecessary suffering?

2.The difference between skilful desire and unskilful craving

Skilful intent

Skilful intent is intention that is not rooted in greed, hatred, or delusion. Greed, in this context, does not refer to all forms of desire, but to desire that becomes compulsive—insisting on fulfilment irrespective of conditions and remaining rigid even when fulfilment is not possible. Such desire creates psychological pressure because it is tied to the assumption of a separate experiencer who must be fulfilled. In contrast, desire that supports stability—when grounded in ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom—may arise and function without producing

suffering, as long as it remains flexible and can be relinquished when conditions do not allow its fulfilment.

Hatred refers to compulsive resistance, aversion, or ill-will toward what is present, including the impulse to reject or eliminate experience as if such resistance were required to fulfil a separate experiencer. This does not mean the absence of appropriate avoidance or protective action. Actions such as avoiding harm—guided by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom, such as not walking into fire—remain functional responses to conditions and are not expressions of hatred.

Delusion is the misperception of reality, most fundamentally expressed as identification with a separate experiencer or independent controller. It includes the belief that experiences belong to an entity that must secure fulfilment or avoid pain. From this misperception, both greed and hatred are sustained.

Thus, skilful intent arises without compulsive grasping, resistance, or identification. Guided by ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom, it remains responsive to conditions rather than driven by fixed demands.

Examples include:

- the desire to learn
- the desire to improve one's abilities
- the desire to protect life
- the desire to help others
- the desire to cultivate ethical conduct
- the desire to develop clarity of mind

These motivations do not necessarily create suffering.

They can function without producing psychological conflict.

A person may wish to perform well in their work.

They may prepare carefully, act responsibly, and learn from mistakes.

4. Unskilful intent

Unskilful intent refers to action driven by compulsive grasping or compulsive resistance, rooted in identification with a separate experiencer who must be fulfilled or protected. It manifests as rigid insistence on particular outcomes or as rejection of present conditions, as if one's completeness or safety depends on changing them. Such intent generates psychological conflict because it is based on the assumption of an entity that must secure fulfilment or avoid discomfort.

For example, when striving for success, one may become excessively anxious about achieving a particular result and react with frustration or self-criticism when outcomes do not align with

expectations. Here, the action is not guided by clarity or an appropriate response to conditions, but by compulsion arising from identification, thereby intensifying suffering rather than resolving it.

3. Why Desire Cannot Guarantee Fulfilment?

Desire aims at results.

However, results depend on many conditions beyond individual control.

These conditions include:

- the actions of other people
- economic circumstances
- health
- environmental factors
- timing
- chance events

Even best possible effort cannot guarantee success.

Therefore, desire always operates in a field of uncertainty.

This does not mean desire is useless.

It means desire must be held with realism.

When desire is treated as a preference rather than a demand, action remains intelligent and flexible.

When desire becomes rigid insistence, suffering increases.

4. Importance of repetition and the formation of tendencies and dispassion

Repetition and the Formation of Tendencies

Human behaviour also develops patterns through repetition.

When a desire is repeatedly indulged, the tendency to repeat it becomes stronger.

For example:

Repeated anger strengthens the habit of anger.
Repeated greed strengthens the habit of greed.
Repeated compassion strengthens the habit of compassion.
Repeated discipline strengthens the habit of discipline.

This pattern occurs because the nervous system learns through reinforcement.

Desires that are repeatedly followed become more powerful.

Desires that are consistently released gradually lose strength.

Over time, this process shapes the character of the mind.

Understanding this principle allows deliberate cultivation of beneficial tendencies.

The Role of Dispassion

Dispassion does not mean suppressing desire.

Suppression often produces psychological tension and later rebounds.

Instead, dispassion develops through understanding.

When the mind clearly sees the limits of a particular desire, the attraction weakens naturally.

For example, if someone repeatedly observes that chasing constant validation produces anxiety, the intensity of that desire may gradually diminish.

Similarly, when a person sees that certain pleasures bring more disturbance than satisfaction, the mind may lose interest in them without force.

Dispassion therefore arises from insight rather than repression. However, insight alone is not sufficient; it requires the support of ethical restraint and meditative cultivation within a supportive environment. Initially, this may appear as suppression, but with an integrated approach of ethics, meditative cultivation, and wisdom, the urge toward unskilful intent gradually dissolves without leaving any residue of suppression.

Supportive environments (Monastic)

These are environments deliberately structured to reduce distraction and reinforce insight:

1. Structured routine (Vinaya-based life)

- Fixed schedule: meditation, study, alms, rest
- Reduces decision fatigue and impulsive desire

2. Minimal sensory stimulation

- Simple living (robes, basic food, no luxury)
- Limits triggers for craving and aversion

3. Sangha (community discipline)

- Living among practitioners with shared goals
- Mutual accountability and correction

4. Teacher guidance

- Direct feedback from experienced monks/teachers
- Prevents misunderstanding of insight

5. Seclusion / retreat settings

- Forest monasteries, meditation retreats
- Deepens observation without external noise

Supportive environments (Layperson)

These are adapted environments, not total renunciation but intelligent structuring:

1. Intentional lifestyle design

- Limiting unnecessary consumption (social media, entertainment)
- Creating space for reflection

2. Ethical livelihood

- Work that does not constantly trigger greed, harm, or deception
- Reduces internal conflict

3. Daily practice structure

- Fixed time for meditation / reflection
- Even 20–30 min daily stabilizes insight

4. Supportive social circle

- Associating with people valuing growth, not constant stimulation
- Avoiding environments driven by comparison/validation

5. Learning environment

- Reading, discussion groups, retreats
- Keeps understanding alive and deepening

6. Physical environment cues

- Quiet space at home
- Removing triggers (e.g., addictive apps, clutter)

A supportive environment is one that reduces triggers for unskilful patterns and reinforces conditions for clarity, stability, and insight."

5.Why even the Buddha did not eliminate all forms of functional desire

The Buddha taught the end of craving, not the end of all motivation.

Early Buddhist texts distinguish between unskilful craving and wholesome aspiration.

For example, the Buddha encouraged:

- the desire to cultivate wisdom
- the desire to reduce suffering
- the desire to help others

These motivations support the path of liberation.

Even Gautama Buddha himself continued to act after awakening.

He taught for decades, walked from place to place, spoke with countless individuals, and helped establish a community of practitioners.

These actions required motivation.

However, the difference lay in attachment.

The Buddha did not act to protect a personal identity or to secure personal fulfilment.

Action arose as a natural response to conditions rather than from psychological craving.

Desire Without Psychological Bondage

The key transformation is therefore not the destruction of desire but the removal of bondage to desire.

Desire can still appear.

Action can still occur.

Effort can still be made.

But the mind no longer believes that fulfilment of desire is necessary for peace.

When a desired outcome occurs, it is appreciated.

When it fails to occur, life continues without collapse.

Desire becomes a tool rather than a master.

Wise Relationship with Desire

A wise relationship with desire involves three recognitions.

First, certain desires are necessary for life.

They support health, learning, protection, and cooperation.

Second, desires are unreliable.

They promise fulfilment but depend on uncertain conditions.

Third, clinging to outcomes produces unnecessary suffering.

When these three recognitions become clear, desire loses its power to dominate the mind.

Action continues, but attachment weakens.

6. Whether Buddha can kill to protect an innocent person?

If the Buddha refuses to kill because he does not want hatred in his mind, but allows others (kings, soldiers) to use violence when required, isn't that morally asymmetric — even hypocritical?

This is a serious ethical problem, and it deserves a serious answer.

First: what the Buddha does not do?

The Buddha does not say:
• "You should hate so that I don't have to"
• "You should kill so that I remain pure"
• "Violence is good for rulers"

There is no sutta where the Buddha instructs someone to kill.

This matters.

What he does do — and why it looks asymmetric?

The Buddha distinguishes paths, not moral worth.
• The arahant/Buddha path → total eradication of hatred
• The householder/ruler path → partial restraint in an imperfect world

This is not:
"You do violence so I don't have to"
It is:

"Your mind has not uprooted hatred; therefore different responsibilities apply."
This is not hypocrisy; it is ontological difference.

Why the Buddha does not "delegate hatred"?

Hatred is not transferable.

If a king kills:
• the king bears the intention
• the king bears the karmic consequence

• the Buddha does not "use" that hatred

The Buddha does not benefit from others' violence.
He does not gain safety, power, or advantage from it.
He lives exposed, without armies or protection.
So the idea that he is "letting others hate so he can stay pure" does not fit the facts.

Why he does not prohibit all violence either?

Here is the hard truth Buddhism does not hide:
The Buddha does not claim to have solved all moral problems of a violent world.

He teaches:
• how suffering ends
• how hatred ends
• how liberation works

He does not claim:
• that society can function without coercion
• that rulers can govern without force
• that tragic moral dilemmas disappear

This is not evasion — it is scope clarity.

Is this morally unsatisfying? Possibly — but it's coherent

Our discomfort comes from expecting one unified moral rule for all levels of being.

But Buddhism is stratified ethics:
• what is possible for an awakened mind
• what is possible for an unawakened society

The Buddha does not say:
"Because I don't kill, no one else should ever kill."
Nor does he say:
"Because others kill, I should kill too."
He refuses both simplifications.

Is this unjust?

It would be unjust only if:
• the Buddha gained benefit from others' violence
• or imposed violence while refusing it himself
• or claimed moral superiority over those trapped in tragic roles

But none of these appear in the suttas.

Instead:
• he refuses power
• refuses protection
• refuses coercion
• and does not shame those who cannot do the same
That is restraint, not asymmetry for advantage.

The uncomfortable but honest conclusion

Let me state it plainly, without defence or apology:
• The Buddha does not kill
• He does not suffer mentally
• He does not command violence
• He does not deny tragic necessity in the world
• He does not claim to resolve political ethics
• He offers a path out of compassion, not a blueprint for states

This will feel unsatisfying if one expects Buddhism to be a total moral system for geopolitics.

But it is internally consistent.

The Buddha neither suffers nor delegates violence; he simply refuses to generate hatred himself, without pretending that the unawaken world has escaped tragic responsibility.

The teaching of Buddha is widely associated with non-violence (ahiṃsā) and compassion (karuṇā). Yet a persistent ethical challenge remains unresolved in many traditional explanations:

7.Why the Buddha Allowed Non-Vegetarian Food?

How can non-violence be reconciled with the acceptance of meat consumption, when an alternative that avoids killing is available?

Differences in the Nature of Suffering Across Species

The question of whether non-vegetarian food systems lead to greater suffering should be approached through observable differences in experience, rather than assuming that all forms of life suffer equally.

In mammals such as cows, goats, dogs, and to a meaningful extent chickens, pain appears as a multi-layered experience rather than a simple reaction. These animals show clear emotional variation; for example, their vocalizations differ in tone during calm states, mild discomfort, and intense distress. They also demonstrate behavioural flexibility. An animal may refuse to eat food

or hesitate to enter a location where it previously experienced harm, even when hungry, indicating memory-based evaluation rather than immediate reaction.

Further, their responses change when pain is reduced. For example, when given pain-relieving medication, animals often become calmer, resume normal movement, and return to activities such as eating or social interaction. This indicates that the unpleasant state is not merely a reflex at the moment of injury but a sustained internal condition that can be alleviated, influencing behaviour over time. Many mammals also display expressive bodily signals—such as changes in posture, movement, or tail activity—that correlate with emotional states. These patterns together suggest that pain in such animals is integrated across perception, memory, and behaviour.

Chickens, although simpler than larger mammals, also show several of these features. They exhibit distress calls when threatened and avoid locations associated with negative experiences. While their level of complexity may differ, there is still meaningful evidence that their responses go beyond purely reflexive reactions.

In contrast, insects clearly exhibit reactions such as escape and avoidance. However, these responses are often immediate and stereotyped, with comparatively limited evidence of flexible trade-offs—such as foregoing food to avoid previously associated harm—as well as limited evidence of long-term behavioural change based on past harm or modulation of internal state through relief. This does not establish the absence of suffering in insects, but it suggests that the depth and integration of suffering may differ.

Total Harm and Resource Use

Non-vegetarian systems increase total harm rather than reduce it. Animals raised for food consume significantly more plant resources than they produce as edible output , as much of the energy they consume is used for their own survival processes rather than being converted into food. As a result, producing meat requires multiple times more crops than directly consuming plants, leading to increased agricultural activity and, consequently, greater indirect harm, including insect deaths. Thus, meat production amplifies rather than replaces plant-related harm.

Direct and Indirect Harm

In addition to indirect harm, non-vegetarian systems involve direct, intentional killing of animals with strong evidence of suffering. This killing is not incidental but a necessary part of the system. In contrast, harm in plant agriculture, although real, typically occurs as a by-product rather than as the primary aim.

Environmental Impact and Extended Harm

The impact of non-vegetarian systems extends beyond individual animals. Methane emissions from animals such as cows, along with land use for grazing and feed production, contribute to environmental degradation, including deforestation and habitat loss. These changes affect a wide range of living beings and increase suffering across ecosystems.

Artificial Population Expansion

Modern animal farming does not regulate natural populations but actively creates and sustains them for production. Without demand for meat, these large populations would not exist in the same numbers. Thus, the system generates additional suffering rather than reducing it.

Conclusion on Harm

Taken together, these factors indicate that while plant-based systems are not free from harm, non-vegetarian systems result in greater total harm and a higher likelihood of intense and integrated suffering across multiple levels.

Why the Buddha Still Allowed Meat Consumption

The position of the Gautama Buddha must be understood within the scope of his teaching. The Buddha did not attempt to construct a system that eliminates all harm in the world. Instead, his focus was on the causes of suffering as they arise within the mind, particularly intention.

Since living involves unavoidable harm—where even activities such as agriculture result in the death of insects, and even basic processes like breathing affect microscopic life—making the complete elimination of harm a strict requirement would render ordinary functioning unsustainable and create excessive moral burden. This becomes especially problematic if one assumes guilt for all indirect harm where there is neither intention to kill nor participation in causing or demanding such harm, and where one has no control over the actions and intentions of others.

For this reason, the Buddha prohibited intentional acts of violence, including killing living beings, causing or commissioning killing, engaging in trades dependent on killing, and ritualized slaughter. These actions cultivate cruelty and reinforce the mental conditions—greed, hatred, and delusion—that generate suffering.

At the same time, he allowed the consumption of meat under specific conditions. This allowance is not based on the claim that such consumption is harmless, but on the principle that ethical responsibility lies in intention rather than in the total chain of indirect consequences. Accordingly, meat could be consumed only when the individual had not seen, heard, or suspected that the animal was killed specifically for them.

It may be argued that even without direct intention, indirect participation contributes to further killing, since consumption may sustain systems that lead to additional harm. This is addressed within the Buddha's framework by locating ethical responsibility in intention and direct participation. He prohibited demanding or causing killing and allowed consumption only when the animal was already dead and not killed specifically for the individual. Thus, the absence of intention and non-participation in demand define the ethical boundary, even though indirect consequences in the broader system may continue.

A further question may arise as to why such allowance does not extend to consuming human flesh. The distinction does not arise from habit or preference, but from the ethical and relational conditions necessary for social stability. Human life is embedded within networks of mutual trust, protection, and responsibility. Permitting harm toward members of one's own species would undermine these conditions, leading to widespread fear, instability, and breakdown of social order. Therefore, refraining from such harm is a necessary expression of ethical conduct that sustains a stable and compassionate society.

Final Integration

Thus, even if non-vegetarian systems result in greater total harm, the Buddha's allowance of meat consumption is not a claim that such systems are harmless or optimal. It is grounded in the recognition that suffering is perpetuated through intention rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion, and that liberation depends on the cessation of these mental causes rather than on complete control over external conditions.

8.Why the Buddha Denied Sensual indulgence? How Monks destroyed lust?

Physical intimacy is not denied because of:
• desire (Chanda),
• experience,
• repetition,
• transient pleasure,
• self-reference,
• distress when not met,
• comparison or worth alone.

Because all of these exists even in act of begging for food.

It brings additional entanglement, which further solidifies identity.

The three specific entanglement pathways

1. Validation-seeking

Physical intimacy between partners easily becomes a channel for:
• being wanted,
• being chosen,
• being affirmed.

This is not required for survival .

2.Marriage-based entanglement

Marriage structurally brings:
• financial responsibility,
• emotional co-regulation,
• medical dependence,
• social-status pressure,
• physical obligation.

And crucially:
• loss in one domain multiplies pain in all others
(job loss → marital stress → guilt → fear).

This is structural, not moral.

3. Non-accepted norms

When sensual indulgency occurs outside accepted norms, it brings:
• fear of defamation,
• punishment (legal/social),
• family breakdown.

Again: not moral judgment — predictable consequence.
So the denial is engineering to reduce non- essential agitation, not moralism.

How monks destroyed lust?

The Buddha created a setup that naturally destroys lust. Initially, it appears as suppression, but soon it becomes a natural inclination with no urge.

1. Moderation in food
• Eating once a day
• Avoiding rich, stimulating foods
• No eating at night
Reduces hormonal excitation.

2. Regular physical movement (walking, standing, sitting)
• No sedentary indulgence
• Balanced bodily fatigue
Discharges excess energy naturally.

3. Adequate but simple rest
• No luxurious beds
• No oversleeping

4.Mindfulness of the body as it is
• There is a profound similarity between our bodies and those of others; we share the same

fundamental elements and biological functions, with the exception of specific gender -based differences.

• Apart from its attractive features, the body contains many unattractive parts – such as blood, mucus, saliva, faeces and urine – along with unpleasant Odors and complex digestive and waste systems, all wrapped within skin.

• The body is subject to decay—marked by thinning hair, shrunken skin, weakened, loose muscles and the physical decline of old age, such as incontinence. It eventually moves toward death and decomposition.

The Buddha did not deny the existence of attractive part or pleasures; rather, he instructed us to see the totality of existence. By understanding the full cycle of life and decay along with total body structure instead of focusing on attractive part only, we cease to crave these temporary states to feel complete.

5.Celibacy (strict)
• No indulgence in lust. Allowing urges to settle naturally
Trains the system that arousal ≠ action.
Prevents reinforcement of the stimulus–release loop.

6.Sense restraint (indriya-saṃvara)
• Avoiding gazing at attractive forms
• No erotic speech, jokes, or stories
• No erotic music, dancing, shows
• No adornment, perfumes, cosmetics
Cuts off the primary trigger chain and keeps the nervous system quiet.

7. No fantasy cultivation
• Not replaying images
• Not elaborating thoughts
• Not "finishing the story" mentally
Lust feeds on imagination more than sensation.

8 Deep effortless concentration (jhāna)
• Unified attention
• Inner fullness
Makes sensual pleasure feel coarse and unnecessary.

9. No possessions
• No money
• No property
Removes lifestyle escalation.

10. No family structure
• No partner
• No children
Removes relational obligation loops.

11. Simple social role

• No status competition
• No success/failure identity
Removes validation pressure.

12. Insight into non-necessity
Seeing lust as unnecessary for life and peace

13.Insight into impermanence of pleasure
Seeing the relief is brief and costly

14. Insight into non-ownership
No experiencer needing fulfilment.

These do not stop biology,
but they end relevance.

Summary
Lust ends not because insight alone defeats biology, but because:
• stimulation is reduced,
• reinforcement is stopped,
• imagination is starved,
• alternative joy is established,
• life is simplified,
• and insight matures in this calm.

No single condition is sufficient.
Together, they make lust unnecessary and eventually absent.

The Buddha did not suppress lust— he redesigned life so that lust no longer fit to avoid identity based craving leading to suffering.

9.If a deliberate lie could save multiple innocent lives, should the Buddha have lied?

A grave moral question confronts us:

If he refused and lives were lost, what value does such Nirvana hold—especially when the loss is real, irreversible, and cannot be undone?

In this scenario:

- innocent lives are at stake,
- the loss cannot be reversed,
- refusal to lie fails to prevent death,
- and the Buddha's decision appears to place truth above life.

According to the early suttas, the Buddha's position is unambiguous:

He does not choose deliberate false speech, even to save lives.

This refusal does not deny tragedy.

The Buddha does not claim that loss is acceptable, justified, or compensated by liberation.

He does not force others to agree or to sanctify the outcome.

The loss remains real.

The question, therefore, is not whether harm occurred, but:

What benefit—if any—accrues to others beyond the Buddha's own cessation of suffering?

1. What the Buddha Did Not Claim?

The Buddha did not claim:

- that speaking truth guarantees safety,
- that right action ensures benefit for everyone,
- that he controls outcomes,
- or that his path eliminates all tragic dilemmas.

He fully acknowledged that actions unfold within conditions beyond any individual's control.

Speaking truth is right action, but it does not grant control over results.

2. Why the Buddha Rejected Even a Life-Saving Exception?

At first glance, a narrow exception seems reasonable:

"Lying is wrong—except to save life."

The Buddha rejected this not because life was unimportant, but because ethical principles in his teaching are training conditions for the mind, not situational calculations.

Once an exception is allowed, the mind learns:

"Reality may be distorted when stakes are high."

This lesson does not remain confined to one case.

Greed, fear, and self-interest rarely appear as such.

They easily disguise themselves as protection, necessity, responsibility and prevention of harm.

Thus, what begins as: "I lied to save life "gradually expands into:

"I lied to preserve stability"

"I lied to prevent chaos"

"I lied because consequences were too great"

The Buddha's refusal is grounded in psychological realism, not moral idealism.

The loss of life remains tragic and irreparable.

Nothing in the Buddha's teaching converts loss into moral credit.

Yet his refusal produced durable benefits beyond his own liberation.

A. Preservation of Truth as a Public Refuge

Truth remained non-negotiable and non-instrumental.

Speech was not weaponized under fear.

This preserved trust at a structural level, preventing authority like kings, officials, monks, institutions, revolutionaries from becoming coercive or manipulative.

B. Prevention of Moral Boundary Collapse

Allowing deception even once establishes precedent.

The Buddha's refusal blocked:

- expansion of "ends justify means" reasoning,
- normalization of manipulation,
- gradual erosion of ethical restraint.

This protected future beings, not just present ones.

C. Modelling Action Without Fabrication

The Buddha demonstrated that:

- compassion does not require deception,
- courage does not require distortion,
- responsibility does not require claiming control.

This preserved ethical clarity in others rather than degrading it under pressure.

D. Long-Term Reduction of Suffering Through Teaching

The Buddha's uncompromised credibility enabled decades of teaching that:

- discouraged violence,
- restrained exploitation,
- cultivated compassion and restraint,
- reduced suffering across generations.

A single lie might save lives once.

A trusted path saves lives repeatedly.

3. Refusal to Lie Was Not Refusal to Act

The Buddha did not equate truthfulness with passivity.

Within the suttas, he endorsed:

- warning without fabrication,
- physical intervention,
- restraint and obstruction of harm,
- silence, redirection and delay,
- personal risk and sacrifice.

What he refused was fabrication as a moral tool.

His stance was not:

"I will not try."

It was: "I will act without distorting truth, and without claiming control over outcomes."

4. Why This Is Not Simple Selfishness?

Cessation of suffering is realized individually.

That fact is not denied.

But selfishness implies:

- privileging oneself over others,
- denying harm,
- or justifying loss.

The Buddha did none of these.

He acknowledged tragedy.

He refused to beautify it.

He did not claim omnipotence.

He simply refused to add self-deception to suffering.

Conclusion:

Yes, lives were lost.

Yes, the loss cannot be undone.

Yes, liberation does not compensate the dead.

Yet beyond the Buddha's own cessation of suffering, his refusal to lie preserved:

- truth as a refuge,
- ethical boundaries against erosion,
- action without manipulation,
- and a path that reduces suffering across generations.

The Buddha did not claim that right action guarantees right outcomes.

He refused to claim control he did not have.

Whether one accepts that refusal is a moral choice.

The Buddha never forced it—but neither did he hide its cost.

Illustration of Desire Through a Practical Example

Let us understand the importance and unreliability of desire through one of the most common sources of both satisfaction and suffering: romantic relationships. The same understanding can be applied to other major situations, such as job loss or the death of a loved one.

The intention is neither to glorify nor to reject relationships, but to develop dispassion so that their pleasantness can be experienced without expectation of possession, and they can be let go without deep psychological disturbance when conditions change, as they depend on conditions and are therefore not fully reliable.

Bright side

Romantic relationships are among the most valued forms of connection and may include qualities such as loyalty, special care, a sense of safety, and a feeling of belonging irrespective of time and physical presence. Attraction may be present, and when not compulsive, it may coexist with respect for the other person's consent.

It may evolve into a fulfilling relationship grounded in kindness, which tends to support longer-term stability.

Dark side of relationships

However, there is another side as well.

1. Romantic relationships arise from basic conditions like attraction and are not inherently special as if defined only by loyalty and care.

Even if a relationship contains loyalty, care, and emotional connection, these alone may not be sufficient to form or sustain it. Also, emotional attachment in terms of loyalty and exclusive care is often associated with physical attraction, as it is observed that in its absence, the relationship is more likely to be categorized as friendship or a general humanity-based relationship.

Physical attraction often acts as a gatekeeper. While familiarity may increase attraction in some cases, it may not transform strong aversion into attraction.

The same behaviour may appear pleasant or charming when coming from someone we are attracted to, and irritating or disrespectful when coming from someone we are not attracted to.

It is also observed that someone initially perceived as attractive may later appear unattractive due to changing perceptions and experiences.

Therefore, we should not assume that our love is inherently superior or that others are wrong. Just as our preferences are not fully under our control, others also have limitations in their preferences. These should be respected, instead of labelling others as wrong or cruel and oneself as right or generous, as both operate within their own conditions.

2. The body is attractive yet impermanent

As discussed, a romantic relationship may evolve into a deeply fulfilling, kindness-based relationship, but one of the common gatekeeping conditions is acceptable physical attraction, which may develop with familiarity.

There is another dimension as well, which can support the development of dispassion—without confusing it with hatred. The basis of attraction—the body—undergoes various changes with aging, which may reduce strong emotional attachment and physical attraction in terms of romantic pull, and may shift the relationship toward humanity-based, trust-based, or kindness-based companionship.

These changes include reduced physical appeal in appearance, such as loosening of muscles, wrinkles, and loss of glow; possible extreme changes in body weight; loss of bodily control in certain conditions; and, eventually, after death, decomposition of the body into bones.

3. Intense pleasure fades and effort may increase

Even when a relationship is formed, the initial excitement fades after a short period. What remains may be a stable and meaningful bond, but it also requires continuous effort.

This may include expectations that can be highly demanding:
• time and attention
• emotional expression
• financial stability
• appearance and sensual engagement

• compatibility with family and environment
• contribution to shared responsibilities

These expectations may not always be met, leading to pressure, embarrassment, or conflict.

There may also be fear of loss or actual loss through separation, betrayal, or death. Comparison and competition may also arise.

4. When conditions are not aligned

If conditions are not favourable, suffering may arise in forms such as:
• feelings of worthlessness despite being caring or loyal
• fear of being remembered negatively
• confusion about the other person's intentions
• deprivation of companionship
• jealousy

Difference between attachment and love

Both may include care, but attachment is more centred on one's own needs, whereas love is more centred on the well-being of the other.

Attachment may weaken or end if one's own needs are not fulfilled by the other, whereas love does not depend entirely on such fulfilment.

Attachment tends to be possessive and associated with jealousy, whereas love allows freedom.

Even in extreme forms of sacrifice, such as giving one's life, the action remains conditional in the sense that it is experienced as more acceptable or less distressing than the alternative. However, two different directions may arise: in one, there is a reduction of suffering for both; in the other, there is an increase in suffering for the other as well as for the person who becomes a condition for making others suffer, though at any given point it may exist in a subtle form, provided the intent is rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion, which leads them away from peace.

Often, the same person may exhibit both attachment and love at different times.

The Gautama Buddha acknowledged unpleasant experience when seeing others in suffering but did not collapse, as no separate experiencer is found to collapse. **He maintained a middle path in helping others, recognizing that neglecting the body and mind beyond a certain threshold would reduce the capacity to help oneself as well as others.** Such neglect is considered extreme renunciation and is avoided if conditions allow stability to be maintained.

Persistence as a Condition (Uncertain and Not Fully Knowable)

It cannot be conclusively determined whether persistence itself functions as a condition that changes another person's feelings, or whether changes occur due to other conditions such as familiarity, timing, emotional readiness, or environmental factors.

In some cases, persistence appears to be associated with a change in outcome. However, this does not establish that persistence itself is the decisive condition, as multiple conditions operate together, and their relative contribution cannot be isolated with certainty.

In other cases, persistence does not lead to change and may instead result in escalation of discomfort for the other person and increased suffering for oneself.

Therefore, it remains unknown whether persistence is an effective or reliable condition, and if it is, to what extent it contributes to a change in outcome.

Given this uncertainty, it is not appropriate to assume that persistence will lead to the desired result.

Hence, the decision should not be based on the expectation of success through persistence, but on the observation of present conditions—especially the presence or escalation of suffering.

If persistence is leading to:

• the perception of irritation, fear, defamation, or disrespect in the other person

• significant suffering for the person who is persisting, including repeatedly seeking answers that cannot be conclusively resolved—such as whether they are remembered negatively (as fearful, untrustworthy, foolish, or unattractive), whether they are forgotten or still remembered, whether they were loved even for a moment, deprivation of companionship, and jealousy

• or potential social or ethical consequences

then persistence beyond a certain point is not a prudent course of action, regardless of uncertain future possibilities.

If conditions are not supportive, stepping back is appropriate. If conditions are supportive, response from the other person will arise accordingly without forced continuation.

Thus, persistence is not rejected as impossible, but it is not assumed as a reliable or controllable condition.

Action is guided not by assumed outcomes, but by present observation, ethical consideration, and reduction of suffering.

Practical approach

Since the mind of another person cannot be fully known, a more balanced approach is:
• express honestly after understanding the situation
• if rejected, step back
• if the other person is interested, they may respond
This reduces confusion and unnecessary suffering.

Handling rejection

Once rejection is clear and it is understood that the situation is not going to change, the following applies:

For immediate recovery when action is not possible:

1. I**f a painful experience arises, apply mindful non-resistance to it as it is**—not to suppress unpleasant emotions or to resolve questions that cannot be conclusively answered,

but by recognizing that such attempts tend to multiply suffering. This may allow a broader field of peace in which pain coexists without sharp psychological suffering. Deep breathing may support this process.

The experience may continue to reappear even after temporary resolution. Through sustained non-resistance, its intensity, frequency, and duration may diminish, and if conditions align, it may cease.

Additional burdens—such as extreme and prolonged efforts to change the situation despite clear rejection—should be avoided, as they create undue pressure for all involved and amplify existing suffering. Beyond a certain point, such efforts become a form of extreme indulgence, leading to restlessness while pursuing an uncertain outcome that remains unchanged despite prolonged suffering.

2.Compassion: If care is genuine, then allowing the other person to remain at ease—even without us—and maintaining well-wishes can be stabilizing on multiple occasions; however, this is not always the case, as painful experiences may still arise when prior conditioning or trauma is dominant.

2. Sustainable solution

For long-term stability, reliance is placed on:

1. **Ethics** – not harming others, including not pursuing someone against their will
2. **Meditative cultivation** – Reducing mental replay and strengthening stability through non-sensual well-being as a substitute, by directing attention toward constructive engagement in daily routines such as health, work, hobbies, and helping others, so that the mind is less engaged in repetitive painful patterns.
3. **Wisdom** – seeing clearly that:

• relationships are meaningful but not fully under one's control
• they should not define one's worth, as fulfilment of expectations is not fully under one's control
• no separate experiencer exists that requires validation

If it persists even until death and cannot be allowed to pass on its own, this indicates that the conditions for its cessation or reduction are not yet present.

Even so, the effective approaches remain non-resistance to the unfolding of action or inaction according to conditions—including engagement in a meaningful and genuine alternative; compassion; and the dissolution of the urge through ethical conduct, meditative cultivation, and wisdom.

Outcomes are not guaranteed; however, these remain the only effective methods.

Closing Insight

Peace does not require destroying desire.

Peace requires understanding desire.

Some desires support life.

Some desires create suffering.

The task is not elimination but wisdom.

When desire is guided by understanding, life becomes balanced and flexible.

Chapter 8

Lie 4 of Peace — "Spirituality Means Escaping the World"

Truth:
Peace does not require escaping the world.
Peace requires a wise relationship with the world.

After reading this chapter, we will gain clarity on:

1. Why is spirituality often mistaken as withdrawal from life ?
2. The difference between renunciation and escapism
3. Why ethical participation in the world is compatible with peace?
4. The structural difference between the path of monks and the path of laypersons
5. Why complete cessation of suffering is generally easier in monastic conditions?

1. The Misunderstanding About Spiritual Life

Across many cultures, spirituality has often been associated with withdrawal from the world.

People imagine spirituality as:

• living in forests or monasteries
• abandoning family and profession
• withdrawing from social responsibility
• avoiding the complexities of ordinary life

This image partly comes from the visible lives of monks, ascetics, and contemplative practitioners.

Because of this, a common belief develops:

If someone wants peace, they must leave ordinary life behind.

But this belief misunderstands the purpose of renunciation.

Renunciation is not primarily about escaping society.

Renunciation is about reducing conditions that strengthen craving and confusion.

For monks, this reduction happens through structured simplicity.

For laypersons, the same principle can operate within ordinary life through moderation, clarity, and ethical conduct.

Therefore, peace does not require abandoning the world.

Peace requires understanding how to live within the world without becoming enslaved by it.

2. Renunciation vs Escapism

Renunciation and escapism are often confused, but they are very different.

Escapism means running away from problems without understanding them.

Renunciation means reducing unnecessary complexity in order to understand the mind more clearly.

If someone leaves society but continues to carry:

• anger
• craving
• fear
• insecurity

then physical withdrawal has not solved the underlying problem.

The same suffering will continue in a different location.

Renunciation is useful only when it supports deeper understanding.

Without understanding, withdrawal simply relocates the same mental patterns.

3. Participation Without Psychological Bondage

Human life includes many responsibilities.

People care for:

• families
• professions
• communities
• social systems

Peace does not require abandoning these responsibilities.

What changes is the psychological relationship to them.

When identity becomes rigidly attached to roles, suffering increases.

For example:

If someone believes their entire worth depends on professional success, failure becomes psychologically devastating.

If someone believes their value depends entirely on social approval, criticism becomes unbearable.

Peace does not require abandoning roles.

Peace requires loosening the belief that these roles define one's existence.

Work can continue.

Relationships can continue.

Responsibility can continue.

But the mind no longer treats these activities as the foundation of personal identity.

Thus, engagement in the world does not create suffering; identification with roles does.

4. Action Without Absolute Ownership

When people believe they are absolute controllers of outcomes, every success strengthens pride and every failure strengthens guilt.

This creates enormous internal pressure.

However, when actions are understood as arising from conditions rather than from a personal controller, a different relationship with activity becomes possible.

Effort still exists.

Responsibility still exists.

Learning still occurs.

But outcomes are recognized as the product of many interacting conditions.

This recognition reduces unnecessary psychological conflict.

Work continues.

Contribution continues.

But the mind is no longer enslaved by results.

5. Monastic Life and Lay Life

Throughout history, many contemplative traditions recognized that human beings live under very different conditions.

Monastic life deliberately simplifies life conditions.

Monks often adopt disciplines such as:

- celibacy
- minimal possessions
- simplified routines
- reduced sensory stimulation
- stable community structures

These conditions significantly reduce many sources of craving and distraction.

The mind therefore encounters fewer competing desires.

This simplified environment allows deeper investigation into the nature of suffering and craving.

Lay life operates under different conditions.

Laypersons must manage:

• family responsibilities
• economic pressures
• social expectations
• complex relationships
• constant stimulation from modern environments

These conditions continually generate new desires and concerns.

Because of this difference, contemplative traditions historically recognized two practical paths:

The monastic path aims toward complete cessation of suffering.

The lay path primarily involves reducing suffering within complex conditions, though complete cessation is not excluded.

Both paths are meaningful.

They simply operate under different structures of conditions.

6. Why Complete Cessation of Suffering Is Structurally Easier in Monastic Life?

Permanent cessation of suffering becomes structurally easier when certain life conditions are simplified.

Monastic life intentionally reduces powerful sources of craving.

For example:

Celibacy reduces sexual craving.

Minimal possessions reduce attachment to wealth and status.

Simple routines reduce competition and comparison.

Limited sensory stimulation reduces constant desire for novelty.

These conditions create an environment where the mind can observe craving more directly and weaken it more consistently.

Lay life contains far more triggers for desire.

Economic survival requires ambition.

Relationships involve emotional complexity.

Modern environments constantly stimulate comparison and consumption.

These conditions do not make peace impossible.

But they make the complete cessation of craving more difficult.

Therefore, for most laypersons, the practical path is the gradual reduction of suffering rather than immediate total liberation.

This distinction is not a judgment about spiritual worth.

It simply recognizes that psychological processes operate differently under different conditions.

A society composed entirely of realized monks would be unsustainable, as essential social functions would cease. Conversely, without realized individuals, there would be no living demonstration that freedom from suffering is possible without reliance on unstable pleasures. The Buddha therefore established a balanced model of interdependence between monastic and lay communities.

7. Compassion Within the World

Another misunderstanding about spirituality is the belief that peace requires emotional detachment from others.

However, deeper understanding often produces the opposite.

When the illusion of a personal controller weakens, it becomes easier to see that all human beings act through conditions.

People behave according to:

• upbringing
• biological tendencies
• emotional wounds
• cultural conditioning
• misunderstanding

Recognizing this does not excuse harmful behaviour.

But it reduces hatred.

Compassion becomes possible without abandoning responsibility.

A person can oppose harmful actions while still recognizing the limitations that produced them.

This balanced response creates firmness without cruelty.

Closing Insight

Spirituality does not require escaping the world.

It requires understanding how to live within the world without becoming imprisoned by it.

Peace remains compatible with responsibility, work, relationships, and social participation.

The world is not the obstacle.

Misunderstanding the mind is the obstacle.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: What Is Not Possible and What Remains Possible

This book began with a simple but important question:

What is realistically possible for a layperson, and what is not, given the biological limits of the human nervous system, the power of desire, and the conditions of worldly life?

Much human suffering does not arise from pain itself, but from unrealistic expectations about what philosophy, spirituality, or understanding should accomplish.

Clarity therefore requires distinguishing between two things: what human life cannot reliably deliver, and what still remains realistically possible.

Understanding this difference protects us from both false hope and unnecessary despair.

What Is Not Possible

1. Philosophical insight cannot override the biological limits of the human organism.

In situations of extreme physical brutality—such as severe torture, burning pain, or witnessing unbearable harm to loved ones—the nervous system activates powerful survival responses. Under such conditions, the body reacts intensely.

Even an Arhant, according to Buddhist descriptions, would still experience physical pain if the body were injured. The difference is that the Arhant does not generate additional mental suffering, since there is no identification with experience as belonging to a separate experiencer, and therefore no resistance arising from such identification.

Even outside extreme brutality, major life events such as loss of livelihood, rejection in love, or public humiliation can deeply disturb a layperson because worldly life is strongly tied to roles and responsibilities.

2. Insight does not eliminate the need for action.

The functional structure of life continues to operate through memory, planning, language, and coordination. Food must still be arranged, medicine must still be obtained, and responsibilities must still be fulfilled.

3. The power of desire cannot be completely dismissed in lay life.

Desires related to health, relationships, stability, dignity, and livelihood remain deeply embedded in the structure of human society.

Some individuals live under favourable conditions and remain largely satisfied even without pursuing deep philosophical insight, while others face harsher circumstances and experience stronger dissatisfaction.

Human lives therefore differ greatly in the intensity of suffering they contain.

4. Belief systems cannot be universally replaced.

Many people derive meaning, comfort, and psychological strength from religious faith. Devotion or surrender to a higher power may help individuals endure uncertainty and hardship.

At the same time, history shows that religious belief systems have also produced violence, superstition, and social inequality.

Because people remain emotionally attached to their religious traditions, it is unrealistic to expect humanity to unite under a single metaphysical worldview.

A more realistic long-term direction is the gradual strengthening of scientific understanding and human compassion while maintaining tolerance toward different beliefs. Such change, if it occurs, will likely unfold slowly across generations.

What Remains Possible

Even though permanent cessation of suffering may be structurally easier within monastic life, much still remains possible for a layperson.

Progress on this path depends on conditions such as temperament, life circumstances, exposure to wise guidance, and psychological maturity. Therefore, deep realization may not be possible for everyone.

Yet the path itself operates like a mechanism.

Just as touching fire burns the hand and avoiding fire prevents burning, the same principle applies here. When unskilful desires dominate the mind, suffering increases. When ethical discipline, mental cultivation, and wisdom are developed, the mind gradually stops burning in the same patterns of suffering.

The actions and experiences of a realized person may vary according to conditions. This may include unpleasant feeling tones such as fear, physiological responses, or actions like running to preserve life, health, livelihood, or relationships; or it may manifest as stillness. What does not vary, however, is the understanding that all such experiences arise dependently, and that there is no separate experiencer to whom they occur.

With the absence of identification, unpleasant feelings do not transform into mental suffering. Psychological feeling is not equivalent to psychological suffering; suffering arises only when there is identification with a separate experiencer. When this identification drops, mental pain does not arise, even though experiences continue.

This understanding is lived in the following way:

1. Immediate Relief

In difficult moments, the first task is stabilizing the nervous system.

If action is possible and grounded in ethical conduct, mindfulness, and wisdom, it should be undertaken to stabilize the living system. When a situation cannot be changed immediately, non-

resistance to the painful experience allows the mind to open into a wider field of calmness, in which pain may remain but loses much of its sharpness.

This also involves avoiding extremes. Extreme indulgence leads to strain through constant pursuit and instability, including engagement in speculative questions that cannot be resolved through logic. Extreme renunciation, on the other hand, can create unnecessary restlessness without contributing to understanding. A balanced, condition-based response is therefore essential.

Compassion is the capacity to care for others without expectation, even when they do not wish well for you; it dissolves hatred and is inherently fulfilling. However, it must remain grounded in wisdom by preserving functional stability and should not lead to self-collapse through extreme measures, except where such action is genuinely required as a last resort under specific conditions.

2. Sustainable Solution

Ethical living reduces inner conflict, anxiety, and guilt, while also minimizing external consequences such as legal and social repercussions.

Meditative cultivation—such as concentration for clarity and mindfulness in daily action, along with right effort—strengthens skilful intent directed toward the well-being of oneself and others. It supports actions such as helping others, working efficiently, and sustaining life, while weakening unskilful tendencies such as unethical behaviour, rigid expectations that life must conform to personal will, indulgence in additional burdens that cannot be peacefully released, and the delusion of a separate experiencer.

Wisdom includes the following understandings:

There is no imagined controller; rather, intention, action and experience arise through interdependent conditions, including the body and brain - not through a separate self acting as a controller. This reduces self-blame, comparison, hatred, the pressure to guarantee results, and the pride associated with imagined personal authorship.

No separate, unchanging identity exists behind changing experience. This weakens the urge to fulfil or protect an imagined experiencer. It also reduces the tendency to seek validation for such an identity and softens possessive love, allowing it to transform into care rather than ownership.

Action and experience continue, but they are no longer directed toward fulfilling a separate entity. Instead, they operate through interdependent conditions based on necessity, capability, and consequences, which in turn depend on impersonal conditions such as matter, energy, time, space, and situation.

Wisdom also includes recognizing the functional importance of desire in sustaining life, while understanding that desire is not a reliable source of lasting peace, since outcomes are never guaranteed.

Final Insight

With this understanding, one lives at ease, with clarity and compassion—not as acquired states, but as the natural consequence of the absence of identification. There is no longer a separate experiencer waiting to be fulfilled, nor a separate controller attempting to manage life.

Fulfilment does not come from satisfying every experience, but from the absence of the imagined entity that seeks fulfilment. When that illusion is understood, life continues as a process of conditions, free from psychological burden.

Annexures for Buddha Teaching:

Annexure 1:Four Noble Path

1.Suffering is seen even when its achieved. Its not denial of existence of happiness but seeing its dependency on conditions.

2.Craving for unfulfilled desires is reason of suffering. It's based on seeking experience to fulfil unchanging identity.

3.Elimination of craving breaks the link of dependent origination from vedna and thus cessation of suffering takes place.

4.Elimination of craving is done basis eightfold path.

Annexure 2 "Grouping of the Noble Eightfold Path

As taught by Gautama Buddha, the Noble Eightfold Path is one path described in three functional groupings:

1. Wisdom (Paññā / Jñāna)

- Right View
- Right Intention

2. Ethical Conduct (Sīla)

- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood

3. Mental Cultivation (Samādhi / Dhyāna)

- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

These are not sequential steps, but simultaneous trainings that support one another.

The Eightfold Path —

Wisdom (Paññā)

1. Right View
   Seeing suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path—without confusion about self or control.

2. Right Intention
   Intention oriented toward non-greed, non-hatred, and non-harm, rather than identity fulfilment.

Ethical Conduct (Sīla)

3. Right Speech
   Speech that does not deceive, divide, harm, or agitate.
4. Right Action
   Actions that do not cause harm through body or behaviour.
5. Right Livelihood
   Earning a living without exploiting, injuring, or misleading others.

For laypersons, the Buddha explicitly identified five kinds of trade that constitute wrong livelihood:

1. Trade in weapons
   (causing or facilitating killing and violence)

Buddha recognized social and political necessity, but did not endorse violence or weapons as part of the path to liberation.

2. Trade in living beings
   (slavery, human trafficking, trading animals for slaughter)
3. Trade in meat
   (raising or selling animals specifically for killing)
4. Trade in intoxicants
   (alcohol, drugs, substances that cause heedlessness)
5. Trade in poisons
   (intended to harm or kill)

Engaging in these livelihoods directly supports harm and unwholesome states.

Mental Cultivation (Samādhi)

6. **Right Effort**
   Preventing unwholesome states from arising and letting go of those that have arisen.

Core unwholesome roots

- **Greed (lobha) – craving,clinging**
- **Aversion (dosa) – anger, irritation, resentment**

Irritation

What it is: A brief tightening or annoyance.

Duration: Short-lived.

Example: Being mildly annoyed by noise.

Key point: Often passes quickly if not fed.

Anger

What it is: Strong aversion with heat and reactivity.

Duration: Acute and forceful.

Example: Explosive response when blocked or criticized.

Key point: Overt and disruptive.

Resentment

What it is: Stored anger—aversion held in memory and identity.

Duration: Long-term.

Example: Replaying past hurts, silent hostility.

Key point: Sustains suffering even without current provocation.

In short:

Irritation flashes → anger burns → resentment smolders (remains active in a low, hidden form over time.)

- Delusion (moha) – confusion, wrong view, denial(not accepting right view)

7. **Right Mindfulness**
   Clear awareness of body, feeling, mind, and phenomena without identification.
8. **Right Concentration**
   Stable unification of mind that supports stillness and insight (dhyāna).

What concentration includes

1. Formal meditation

- Sitting, walking, or standing meditation
- Mind unified on a theme (breath, body, feeling, mind, dhammas)
- Leads to collectedness and can mature into jhāna

This is the most direct training ground for samādhi.

2. Daily-life collectedness (also essential)

Concentration also develops when the mind is:

- fully present with a task,
- not scattered by craving or aversion,
- not pulled into comparison or inner commentary.

Examples:

- Listening completely without planning a reply
- Working attentively without multitasking
- Eating with full awareness, not distraction
- Responding calmly instead of reacting impulsively

Here, the mind is one-pointed in function, even without a meditation posture.

3. Ethical restraint supporting concentration

Samādhi is strengthened when:

- speech is truthful and non-harming,
- actions are restrained,
- livelihood is clean.

This reduces remorse and agitation, allowing the mind to settle naturally.
So sīla directly supports samādhi.

4. Letting go of unwholesome states

Concentration grows whenever one:

- does not feed irritation,
- drops compulsive thinking,
- releases craving when it appears.

Each time the mind does not scatter, samādhi increases.

What concentration is *not?*

- Not forcing attention
- Not suppressing thought
- Not trance or escape
- Not limited to posture or place

True samādhi is easeful, stable, and clear.

Concentration includes meditation, but it is essentially the steady unification of mind, developed through ethical living, abandoning unwholesome states, formal practice, and mindful engagement in daily activities.

The Noble Eightfold Path integrates wisdom, ethical living, and mental stillness so that craving does not arise from experience, clinging and becoming cease, and suffering comes to an end.

Annexure 3:Types of clinging

The four types of clinging

The Buddha described four kinds of clinging:

1. Clinging to sensual pleasure (kāmupādāna)

Grasping pleasure, comfort, stimulation, or enjoyment as necessary for well-being or completion.

2. Clinging to views (diṭṭhupādāna)

Holding opinions, beliefs, ideologies, or philosophies as "mine," or identity-defining.

3. Clinging to rules and practices (sīlabbatupādāna)

Believing that rituals, austerities, habits, or techniques *by themselves* guarantee purity or liberation.

4. Clinging to self-doctrine (attavādupādāna)

Holding the idea of a permanent self, soul, controller, or experiencer behind experience.

All four involve the same core move:

"This is mine / this I am / this is my self."

The ten fetters and their relation to clinging

The ten fetters (saṃyojana) are the habitual bonds that keep clinging in place and repeatedly recreate identity and becoming.

They are:

1. Personality view (belief in a self)
2. Doubt (about the path)
3. Clinging to rules and rituals
4. Sensual desire
5. Ill will
6. Craving for form existence
7. Craving for formless existence like soul
8. Conceit ("I am")
9. Restlessness

10. Ignorance

Clinging is the taking up of experience as "mine," "me," or "my self." The four types of clinging describe what is grasped; the ten fetters describe how grasping is maintained. When clinging ceases through understanding, fetters dissolve, becoming ends, and suffering comes to an end.

Annexure 4: Dependent Origination

Dependent origination explains how experience and suffering arise through interdependent conditions. It is not a strictly linear sequence in time, but a functional process describing how experience is structured and how identification develops within it.

1. Ignorance (Avijjā)

Ignorance is not seeing reality clearly—especially the absence of a separate experiencer and the conditional nature of all experience. Because of this, experience is misperceived as belonging to "someone."

2. Formations (Saṅkhāra)

Conditioned tendencies arise:

- habits
- reactions
- mental patterns

These shape how experience unfolds.

3. Consciousness (Viññāṇa)

Consciousness is basic knowing:

- seeing
- hearing
- thinking

It does not create the body. Rather, consciousness and the body–mind system arise in mutual dependence.

4. Name & Form (Nāma–Rūpa)

Name and form refer to the structured body–mind system:

- **Form**: physical body
- **Name**: mental functions such as perception, attention, intention, and capacity for feeling

Consciousness and name-and-form are interdependent:

- without a functioning body–mind system, experience cannot occur
- without consciousness, no experience is known

Thus, neither creates the other; together they form the basis of lived experience.

5. Six Sense Bases (Saḷāyatana)

The channels of experience:

- eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind

6. Contact (Phassa)

Contact occurs when:

- sense organ + object + consciousness meet

7. Feeling (Vedanā)

Feeling is the immediate tone of experience:

- pleasant
- unpleasant
- neutral

Feeling arises only after contact within a structured system of name-and-form. Without this structure, feeling cannot arise.

At this stage:

- there is experience
- but no identification yet

Now Identification Begins

8. Craving (Taṇhā) — Movement Toward/Away

Reaction to feeling:

- wanting pleasant
- avoiding unpleasant

◆ **Marker:**
Direction begins, but no clear "I" yet

9. Clinging (Upādāna) — "Mine" Appears

Experience is appropriated:

- "this is mine"

- "this matters to me"

🔹 **Marker:**
Ownership begins ("mine")
"I" is implied but not explicit

10. Becoming (Bhava) — "I am this" Forms

Identity organizes:

- "I am hurt"
- "I am successful"

🔹 **Marker:**
Identity forms ("I am…")
patterns stabilize into self-image

11. Birth (Jāti) — "I" Fully Appears

The sense of self becomes complete:

- "I am the one experiencing this"

🔹 **Marker:**
Full emergence of "I" as a real experiencer
experience and "I" appear inseparable

12. Aging & Death (Jarāmaraṇa)

What is formed:

- changes
- ends
- collapses

This leads to suffering, because the constructed identity cannot be sustained.

With the cessation of ignorance, formations no longer arise in a way that perpetuates suffering. Consciousness, body, senses, contact, and feeling continue as conditioned processes. However, with the cessation of ignorance, feeling no longer gives rise to craving. With the cessation of craving, clinging does not arise; with the cessation of clinging, becoming does not arise; with the cessation of becoming, the formation of a separate 'I' does not arise; and with the cessation of this identification, suffering ceases.

Back Cover Note

What if suffering does not end not because something is wrong, but because the conditions for its complete resolution are not yet present?

Drawing from the Buddha's teaching, this book explores a radical yet practical understanding: there is no permanent self who practices and no permanent self who is liberated, and yet practice unfolds, action occurs, responsibility functions, and suffering can cease—not by force or belief, but through conditions and causes.

When painful experience cannot be eliminated, life need not collapse. Through understanding the absence of a separate doer and an experiencer, we gain freedom from seeking validation, and it becomes possible to live without self-blame, comparison, hatred, and pride, or the burden of being an independent problem-fixer. Responsible action still happens. Meaningful work still matters. Compassion, hobbies, and simple absorption remain available—not as escapes, but as expressions of what is still alive.

This book does not offer quick relief or spiritual consolation. It offers something quieter and more honest: a way of living without self-betrayal, where pain is not denied, yet is no longer allowed to dominate, define, or destroy peace, clarity, and compassion.